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THE TIMES OF INDIA

INCLUDES 28 PAGES OF BANGALORE TIMES

INDIA'S LARGEST ENGLISH NEWSPAPER

Marking the first major personnel change of his second term, Donald Trump replaces **Kristi Noem as homeland security secretary** after bipartisan criticism over her leadership, with immigration agents killing two US citizens

England women's cricket team move their training camp **from UAE to Pretoria, South Africa, due to rising Middle East tensions**, with the tour serving as key preparation for the ICC Women's T20 World Cup

Amit Shah says India is close to eliminating Maoist insurgency and aims to **be Maoist-free by March 31**, warning that security forces will defeat any attempt to form a "red corridor" from Tirupati in Andhra to Pashupati in Nepal

Jemimah Rodrigues was the top scorer as India were **bowled out for 198** on the opening day of the one-off Test against Australia in Perth. At stumps, the home team were 96/3

K'taka first in India to announce social media ban for under-16s

Tech Hub Joins Global Push To Protect Children

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: Karnataka Friday became part of a broader global push to regulate young people's digital lives, with chief minister Siddaramaiah announcing in his budget speech a ban on social media use for those under 16. "We are not suggesting that children should not have access to mobile phones. We are only formulating a policy to ban social media access to children in schools and at home," the CM said.

The govt, however, is yet to explain how the ban will work. Karnataka becomes the first state in India to officially announce a policy while Goa and Andhra Pradesh are considering similar bans.

The move comes amid growing international concern over screen addiction, mental health, cyberbullying and cognitive decline. Countries such as Australia have legislated bans on mobile phone usage by pupils in schools. Several others are at various stages of introducing age limits or stricter verification mechanisms.

While the announcement was hailed by parents' associations, private schools and teachers, experts cautioned that children need structured support to adapt to the ban.

Manoj Sharma, head of SHUT (Service for Healthy Use of Technology) under NIMHANS, said it was important to prepare children for the ban. "There will surely be the fear of missing out (FOMO) among children. Most of them are on social media because of peer pressure. They should be prepared to understand the drawbacks of continuous use of technology," he said. "There will be issues of withdrawal that we must address with other offline activities."

In Australia, the first country to set a minimum age of 16 for social media accounts under its Online Safety Amendment Act, the law places the onus squarely on platforms to take "reasonable steps" to prevent under-16s from creating or maintaining accounts, with heavy fines for breaches. There are no penalties for children or parents, with existing profiles deactivated.

Dr A Jagadeesh, consultant psychiatrist, Abhaya Hospital, called it an experiment. "We are not aware of the consequences. How much will kids be left behind by not learning to handle things that are age-appropriate? Censoring social media content will only heighten curiosity," he said.

COUNTRIES WITH CURBS FOR KIDS

- Ban **implemented in** Australia
- Ban **deadline set in** Indonesia
- Ban **partly approved in** France
- Ban **in consideration** in 12 countries- Poland, Spain, Slovenia, UK, Denmark, France, Malaysia, Norway, Ireland, New Zealand, Czech Republic, Greece
- **Age verification needed in** Brazil and Vietnam

WILL COMPLY: META

"We'll comply with social media bans where they are enforced, but with teens using more than 40 apps weekly, targeting a handful of companies won't keep them safe. Bans should apply equally across the many apps teens use

— Meta spokesperson

Andhra plans a ban for kids under 13

Andhra Pradesh CM N Chandrababu Naidu on Friday said social media will be prohibited for children below 13 years of age, within the next 90 days, in the state. Addressing the assembly, the CM said it's still being debated if the proposed ban should cover children up to 16. **P 5**

K'taka Budget 2026-27: Big Increase For Water; Bengaluru Infra Gets A Push

Growth good, but revenue under strain

TEAM TOI

Karnataka is doing economically well relative to the rest of the country, but CM Siddaramaiah's latest budget also indicated emerging stresses in govt finances that could adversely impact longer-term growth.

Presenting the 17th budget in his political career Friday, the CM noted that the state GDP at constant prices rose 8.1% in 2025-26, higher than the estimated national growth of 7.4%. But that growth did not translate into buoyant revenue growth for the govt.

Revenue receipts in the year rose by only 7%, almost half the 13% he anticipated last year. This meant he had to reduce allocations in a number of areas during the last year to ensure the fiscal deficit did not go out of whack. Despite that experience and signs of the world economy slowing, he projected a 14% rise in revenue receipts for 2026-27.

▶FULL COVERAGE | P 2 & 4

▶FDI flow into state, P 3

STATE'S GROWTH ROBUST AT 8.1%

Areas that got the biggest increase in capex allocations this budget

- **Water supply & sanitation:** Up 72%, at ₹11,853 crore
- **Road transport:** Up 61%, at ₹888 crore
- **Public works:** Up 38%, at ₹5,708 crore
- **Roads & bridges:** Up 28%, at ₹7,640 crore

K'taka share of FDI into India ('25-26 first half) **26.7%**

For Bengaluru

- **43-km intermediate ring road** linking Nelamangala and Bidadi, via Tavarekere and Sondekoppa
- Development of Outer Ring Road from Silk Board Junction to KR Puram Metro Station **into a global-standard corridor at a cost** of ₹450 crore
- ₹7,000 crore grant from state to develop the city

TOI

Chief minister Siddaramaiah presents the 2026-27 budget at Vidhana Soudha on Friday

Beer & wine likely to get cheaper as state links liquor tax to alcohol content

Team TOI

Bengaluru: Beer and wine could get cheaper as Karnataka rolls out a new alcohol-in-beverage (AIB)-based excise duty system from April. This is probably the first time a state is linking liquor taxation directly to alcohol content. This reset will fully deregulate govt price fixation and halve pricing slabs from 16 to eight.

Presenting the budget Friday, CM Siddaramaiah said the uniform excise duty per litre of alcohol would be phased out in 3-4 years, with gradual price changes to avoid disruption. "An AIB-based excise duty structure is globally recognised as the gold standard for alcohol taxation, as it directly targets the alcohol content," he said. The excise target is set at Rs 45,000 crore.

This model is followed in over 50 countries. As an industry expert put it: "They want to tax the alcohol, and not the water in it." In India, beer ABV (alcohol by volume) ranges from 4%–8%, with strong variants at 8%; whiskey is 36%–50% ABV. The AIB system nudges consumers towards lower-alcohol options.

▶ Toast to tourism, P 3

DOUBLE DELIGHT

Today's bumper issue of **TOI** is organised in two sections, both equally packed with news and analysis. To get the full reading experience of today's edition, make sure you don't miss the other section

OTHER BOOK TOP STORIES

- **AIIMS Jodhpur MBBS grad tops civil services exam**
- **US declares 30-day waiver for India to buy Russian oil**
- **Indians were the biggest realty buyers in Dubai last year**

UK will pay asylum seekers to leave

Families of failed asylum-seekers will be offered up to Rs 49 lakh to leave the UK under a trial scheme announced by the home secretary. The pilot scheme is targeting 150 families living in taxpayer-funded hotel accommodation. The families have been given seven days to decide whether to accept the payment or face forcible removal. **Other Bk, P 11**

Mic-drop mandate as Nepal moves to rapper Balen's beat

Vishant.Agarwala
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Kathmandu: Nepal's old political order collapsed on Friday as a Balen Shah-led wave powered Rastriya Swatantra Party to either win or establish substantial leads in at least 114 of 165 first-past-the-post (FPTP) seats, turning the parliamentary election after the Sept 2025 Gen Z uprising into a rout of the establishment.

Former PMs KP Sharma Oli and Madhav Kumar Nepal were staring at major upsets as results trickled in. Gagan Thapa of Nepali Congress was trailing despite emerging as party's new face after ousting five-time PM Sher Bahadur Deuba to lead the organisation.

Only Pushpa Kamal Dahal, 'Prachanda', looked set to survive from the old guard. There too the verdict carried a sting: his daughter, Renu Dahal, was trailing in Chitwan. With counting still under way in most FPTP seats and the 110 proportional representation seats yet to be tallied, a party or alliance needs 138 seats in the 275-member House to secure a majority.

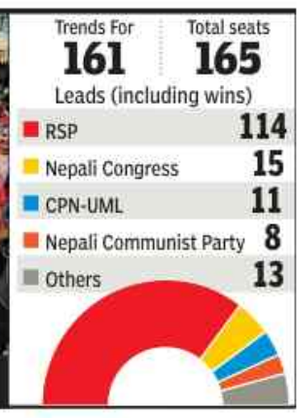
Final tallies were expected only by Saturday afternoon, but the direction of the result had already become unmistakable. The sweep in the Kathmandu Valley was just as striking. In the capital and the adjoining suburbs of Lalitpur and Bhaktapur, RSP was leading in 14 of 15 seats, underlining how decisively the urban electorate had swung behind the new force.

If the trend holds, Balen, 35, is set to take over as PM, capping one of the sharpest generational shifts in Nepal's recent political history.

A former rapper and structural engineer who first built his public image with music, and later as Kathmandu mayor, Balen became the face of the anti-establishment anger that exploded onto Nepal's streets in Sept. But neither Balen nor party leader Rabi Lamichhane issued any statement, made any announcement, or posted on social media on Friday as the scale of RSP's sweep became clear.

▶Balen 4x ahead, P 8

RSP supporters cheer outside a counting centre in Kathmandu



Oppn notice to oust Speaker to be taken up in LS Monday

New Delhi: Setting the stage for a fresh showdown between NDA and opposition, Lok Sabha will take up on March 9 a resolution backed by MPs from Congress and its allies for removal of Speaker **Om Birla** for his alleged partisan conduct. Parliament is reconvening for Budget session's second part from Monday.

Governing NDA's numerical supremacy — it has 293 MPs in the current strength of 541 in the House — renders inevitability to the motion's defeat, but it will test the unity in opposition's ranks. Some of its constituents, including TMC, had not backed the resolution, leading to confidence among treasury benches members that Birla could bag support from outside the bloc as well. TNN

▶Resolution, P 5

2 IAF pilots killed in Sukhoi crash, one of them was part of Op Sindoor

Prabin Kalita, Shishir Arya & Nikhil Sharma | TNN

Guwahati/Nagpur/Gurgaon: Squadron Leader Anuj Vashishth and Flight Lieutenant Purvesh Duragkar, who was part of Operation Sindoor last year, were killed Thursday evening when their Su-30MKI crashed in Assam's hilly Karbi Anglong district shortly after going off the radar during a training sortie, IAF confirmed Friday after locating the wreckage.

The Sukhoi jet had taken off from the World War II-era Jorhat airbase, 200km from Karbi Anglong, around 6.45pm and lost contact with ground control at 7.42pm.

Sqn Ldr Vashishth (29), whose family lives in Gurugram's Sector 22B, was to get married soon. Flt Lt Duragkar (25) had just returned to his squadron after visiting his parents in Nagpur around 10 days ago. His father Ravindra received news of the crashed jet being traced from a relative before the IAF unit's commanding officer called to confirm his pilot-son's death.

"IAF acknowledges the loss of Sqn Ldr Anuj and Flt Lt Purvesh Duragkar, who sustained fatal injuries in the Su-30 crash. All personnel of the IAF express sincere condolences and stand firmly with the bereaved families in this time of grief," IAF posted on X.

Karbi Anglong DC Aranyak Saikia said the jet crashed "into a remote, uninhabited hill" near Rongkhelan village under Nilip block, north of district headquarters town Diphu. The site is a three-hour trek from the nearest road head at Chowkihola, which takes two and a half hours by road to reach from Diphu.

Villagers reported hearing a loud explosion as the jet, engulfed in flames, hurtled down the hillside.

▶Rajnath condoles, P 8

JET WAS ENGULFED IN FLAMES

- Sqn Ldr Anuj Vashishth (top pic) joined **IAF a decade ago**; Flt Lt Duragkar **joined 4 yrs** ago and was part of Op Sindoor
- The Su-30MKI crashed on a **remote, uninhabited hill** near Rongkhelan village, north of Diphu in Assam
- Villagers heard a loud explosion as the jet, **engulfed in flames**, came down; **debris was scattered over a large area**
- Of 13 Su-30MKI crashes since its 2002 induction, **four have occurred in the Northeast**

Dull Earnings Put State On Loan Crutch

Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) is the value of goods and services produced in a state. Nominal GSDP is evaluated at current market prices, not taking into account inflation

2025-26*

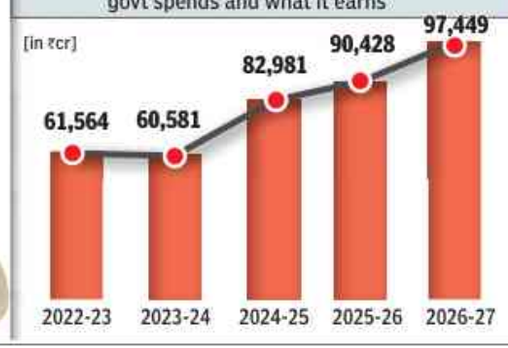
₹32.8 L CR

Growth over previous year: 12.9%

*Budget estimate

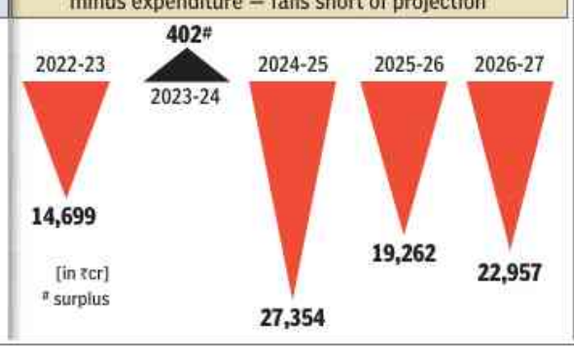
FISCAL DEFICIT*

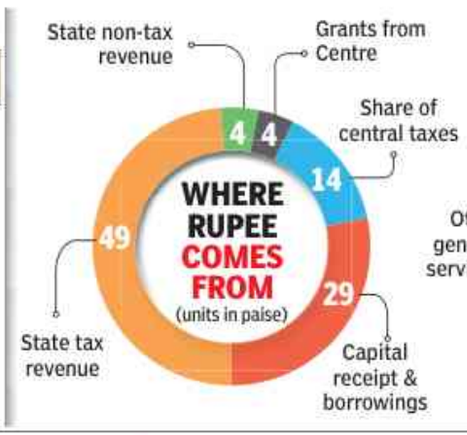
Fiscal deficit is the gap between what the govt spends and what it earns



REVENUE DEFICIT*

Revenue deficit occurs when net income – income minus expenditure – falls short of projection





Wish: Making B'luru 'Most Liveable City'. Plan & Funds: May Not Be Enough | AI, Anti-Narcotics Initiatives Planned

GOVT DOOSRA ON INFRA

OLD PLANS GET NEW TOUCH, FUNDS

TEAM TOI

Mobility. Water. Sanitation. Governance. All areas of concern for every Bengalurean found a mention in the budget Friday as chief minister Siddaramaiah declared: "Our govt's primary objective is to make Bengaluru the world's most liveable city."

However, a deep dive into proposed projects and fund allocations shows old projects finding fresh mentions, allocations for ward roads and stormwater drains appear more like annual maintenance contracts, and similar short-term plans that aren't enough to meet the ambitious goal of making India's tech capital more liveable.

"In 2025-26, the govt increased the grant for development of Bengaluru from Rs 3,000 crore to Rs 7,000 crore. This grant will continue in the current year as well," Siddaramaiah said. But the grants won't be the only allocations.

The 2026-27 plan builds on projects initiated in 2025-26, including ward-level infrastructure works worth Rs 1,255 crore across the five city corporations and concretisation of 158km of roads costing Rs 1,700 crore. Another Rs 1,936 crore has been spent on developing 101 arterial and sub-arterial roads.

For the coming years, the govt intends to deepen these investments. "Over the next three years, more than 450km of roads across Bengaluru will be white-topped at an estimated cost of Rs 3,000 crore to improve durability and reduce maintenance needs. Civic bodies will undertake beautification of 175 junctions, upgrade 500km of footpaths, and build 100 skywalks using internal municipal resources," Siddaramaiah said.

Urban planning will see a reset as well with the Revised Master Plan 2041 expected to be implemented by the end of 2027, while a comprehensive mobility plan will be prepared within six months.

TAKEAWAYS

- ₹7,000cr — Annual grant for Bengaluru
- ₹3,000cr — for white-topping 450km of roads in 3 years
- 500km — footpaths to be upgraded over 3 years
- 100 — skywalks to be built over 3 years
- ₹2,000cr — SWD upgrades under World Bank programme
- Bengaluru Business Corridor Phase 1: 73km | Completion target: 4 years
- Tunnel corridors (Hebbal–Silk Board, KR Pura–Mysuru Road): 40km, ₹40,000cr

For Metro & roads

Mobility projects dominate the budget announcements. Namma Metro, already the country's second-largest Metro network with 96km of operational lines, carries 10 lakh passengers daily. The govt reiterated plans to add 41km of Metro lines, which is expected to raise daily ridership to 15 lakh. Metro officials said Rs 2,110 crore has been allocated to them. They will use the funds for Phase 3 Orange Line, repayment of loans, and cash loss compensation.

Arterial and sub-arterial roads have been allocated Rs 1,936 crore, with Rs 450 crore earmarked for development of a corridor of global standards along the ORR between Silk Board and KR Pura.

Water supply is another focus area as the city's population continues to expand. Bengaluru receives 2,225 MLD of water through phases 1 to 5 of the Cauvery Water Supply Project, serving 1.4 crore residents. The govt has committed to a Rs 6,939-crore project with JICA assistance to bring 6 TMC of water under Cauvery Phase 6.

The govt has approved 40km of tunnel roads linking Hebbal with Silk Board and KR Pura with Mysuru Road, at an estimated cost of Rs 40,000 crore under the BOOT (build-own-operate-transfer) model. Additional projects include a tunnel and elevated road between Hebbal and Mehkri Circle costing Rs 2,250 crore, and a proposed intermediate ring road.

Most infrastructure projects are unlikely to be implemented in the upcoming fiscal. Which means not all of the money announced by Siddaramaiah needs to be disbursed.

Pressing AI accelerator to help farming, edu & more

TEAM TOI

Seeking to strengthen Karnataka's position as the country's leading technological hub by leveraging the burgeoning wave of artificial intelligence (AI), chief minister Siddaramaiah unveiled a series of new initiatives aimed at accelerating the adoption of AI across sectors. From AI-powered support systems for farmers and personalised digital tutors for students to new research centres and robotics hubs, the state govt is expanding its AI ecosystem while aiming to make the technology accessible beyond Bengaluru.

Planning to adopt AI to reach out to farmers at the grassroots level, the govt announced that the existing 'Raitha Kare Kendra' (farmer call centre) will be upgraded using AI tech. The upgraded call centres will provide farmers with quick and reliable information on a range of agricultural inputs, including weather forecasts, market prices, farming technologies and govt schemes, all available through a single digital platform designed to improve accessibility and responsiveness.

Further, in a bid to make learning a more engaging and enjoyable experience for school students, the CM announced the introduction of AI-driven learning tools across schools in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Dharwad. According to officials from the IT and BT department, the collaboration will help develop a personalised self-learning digital tutor powered by AI, giving students the feeling of having a personal tutor by their side and helping improve learning outcomes. Costing about Rs 5 crore, the project is expected to benefit nearly 12.3 lakh students from classes 8 to 12, and is likely to help them solve tricky mathematics problems, simplify complex science concepts, and better understand difficult lessons through customised digital assistance.

With the aim of strengthening the AI research and innovation ecosystem in the state, the govt also proposed the setting up of Bangalore Robotics and AI Innovation Zone (BRAINz) at the AI and Robotics Technology Park (ART-PARK) under the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), in collaboration with Isro and the state-owned Keonics. In addition, a centre of excellence for AI will be established at Indian Institute of Information Technology-Raichur, at an estimated cost of Rs 5 crore, to promote advanced research, innovation, and technology development.

Betting big on AI to bridge the urban-rural technology gap, the govt also has plans to establish modern AI data labs in around 50 govt colleges, largely located in Tier 2 and 3 cities. The initiative will be supported with Rs 10 crore in funding under the Centre's AI Mission.

RIDING HIGH ON AI WAVE

- AI-based paperless registration under Kaveri 3.0 software to be developed for Rs 65 crore
- Bengaluru ranks 5th among the world's top 50 cities in AI and big data
- AI-based facial recognition attendance system at anganwadis, schools, colleges, hostels
- AI to transform existing helpline for food & civil supplies into 'Smart Annavani'
- Govt polytechnics, engineering colleges to offer lessons in AI, machine learning, cloud computing, automation engineering

Source: Budget speech

K'taka looks to add pace to battle against drugs

TEAM TOI

Reaffirming its "zero tolerance for drugs" policy, Karnataka govt has intensified the fight against drug abuse and trafficking by proposing an Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF).

The govt has allocated Rs 10 crore to bolster the task force. With drug trafficking and consumption emerging as a growing concern, the specialised unit has been envisaged to crack down on drug cartels and dismantle networks involved in the illegal trade, especially in Bengaluru city.

State police data shows that around 6,000 cases are registered every year under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985. In 2025, the total value of drugs seized was Rs 104 crore, sources said.

This apart, the state has also proposed enhanced monitoring within prisons through 'Operation Parishuddikarana', under which sophisticated security inspection equipment such as artificial intrusion detection systems, CCTV cameras, and body-worn cameras will be installed at a cost of Rs 20 crore. The initiative is aimed at preventing the use of mobile phones, marijuana and other prohibited items, and curbing illegal activities inside prisons. In addition, the govt has announced that de-addiction and rehabilitation centres for addicts below the age of 18 will be set up in Bengaluru and Dharwad.

INCREASED MONITORING

According to police sources, one of the most common requests they receive during public interaction programmes is to crack down on drug peddlers. "ANTF could prove to be a game-changer if a good set of officers is deployed for the job," a police officer said, while pointing to a steady rise in the trafficking and consumption of hydroponic cannabis, or hydro ganja, in Bengaluru.

As per official data, at least 220kg of hydro ganja was seized in the city over the past 23 months, indicating a growing demand for the high-potency drug. Of this, around 20kg was seized by city police, while the remaining was recovered by Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) in separate operations. Nearly 100 peddlers were arrested in connection with these cases.

Officers from Central Crime Branch (CCB) in the city registered 17 cases related to hydro ganja smuggling from Thailand, including ones where the contraband was discovered inside parcels stored at a post office in Kempegowda Nagar.

Victoria Hospital to get new name

TEAM TOI

The 126-year-old Victoria Hospital in Bengaluru, one of Karnataka's largest public health facilities, will be renamed after veteran socialist leader Shanthaveri Gopalagowda.

The move aims to honour Gopalagowda, a prominent farmers' rights advocate, who was born in Shivamogga district in 1923. Coming from an agricultural background, he was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and joined the freedom struggle.

Following his association with other socialist leaders such as Ram Manohar Lohia, Gopalagowda was drawn to politics. He was elected to the legislative assembly three times — in 1952, 1962, and 1967 — from constituencies in Shivamogga district and is regarded as a pioneer of socialist politics in Karnataka. Gopalagowda spent his last six months at Victoria Hospital where he died.

The foundation stone for the hospital was laid on June 22, 1897, by Maharani Kempananjammanni Devi (Vani Vilasa Sannidhana), regent of the Mysore kingdom. The building was inaugurated in 1900 by the then Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon. Built in a colonial-era architectural style, the hospital later evolved into a major govt medical facility.

Now attached to Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute (BMCRI), it has been frequented by patients from across the state.

The govt also announced Rs 10 crore in the budget to construct a boys' hostel for MBBS and BDS students of BMCRI.

19-yr-old rd project set for new innings

TEAM TOI

The govt has revived a two-decade-old road project on the western outskirts of Bengaluru, proposing a new corridor linking Nelamangala and Bidadi. The move comes even as National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) continues to face delays in implementing the Satellite Town Ring Road (STRR) project, envisaged to connect Tumakuru Road and Hosur Road via the Bengaluru-Mysuru highway.

The proposed 43km road from Nelamangala to Bidadi, planned via Tavarekere and Sondekoppa, will serve as an alternative to NICE Road and provide connectivity between Tumakuru Road and the Bengaluru-Mysuru access-controlled highway. The project is estimated to cost Rs 900 crore, including Rs 450 crore for land acquisition.

CM Siddaramaiah said the road will be developed as part of the long-pending Intermediate Ring Road (IRR), using resources from the Bengaluru Metropolitan Region Development Authority (BMRDA) and local planning authorities, with the aim of easing traffic congestion on the city's outskirts. The IRR was first proposed in 2007 but failed to take off because of multiple hurdles.

43KM ALTERNATIVE ROAD

More than two decades ago, the authorities planned a 210km IRR linking several towns around Bengaluru, including Nelamangala, Tavarekere, Bidadi, Harohalli, Anekal, and Varthur. Karnataka Road Development Corporation Ltd (KRDCL) was tasked with executing the project. In 2020, KRDCL initiated plans to build about 148km of peripheral roads across 10 stretches at an estimated cost of Rs 1,200 crore, but much of the work remains incomplete.

A senior urban development department official said, "This is a long-pending project. Authorities had taken up the work in bits and pieces earlier. Over the years, several buildings have come up along the previously planned alignment. The govt has now decided to revive the project."

EXTRA COVER

₹500cr for suburban rail project

The CM has announced that land acquisition for Corridor 2 (Benniganahalli–Chikkabanavara) under the Bengaluru Suburban Railway Project (BSRP) has been completed and construction is under way. Acquisition for Corridor 4 (Heelalige–Rajanukunte) is also in progress, with the govt targeting completion of both corridors by Dec 2030. For the current year, Rs 500 crore has been allocated for works on these two corridors.

Vehicle-scrapping facility

A vehicle-scrapping facility is to be set up in Chikkaballapur district to safely dispose of end-of-life vehicles. The facility, to be developed by the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board (KIADB), is expected to come up on 100 acres of land. The proposed centre will support safe dismantling and recycling of old vehicles, in line with the Centre's vehicle scrappage policy, and help promote environmentally responsible disposal of ageing vehicles.

Free hit at insulin pens for children

The govt has announced free insulin pens for all children up to the age of 18 with Type 1 diabetes. This had been a long-standing demand from parents as the expenditure on pens was taking a significant toll on socio-economically weaker households. Unavailability of insulin in govt institutions had led to a dependence on private pharmacies for these families, which spend around Rs 4,000 a month on insulin pens.

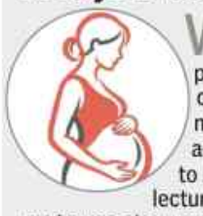
Kerala-inspired palliative care

The govt will be providing home-based palliative care for patients suffering from severe chronic and terminal illnesses, following the Kerala model, the CM said. This care will be provided by Pallium India, a national registered charitable trust. A sum of Rs 5 crore has been earmarked to establish comprehensive geriatric palliative care units, at a cost of Rs 50 lakh each at 10 old-age homes run by Christian institutions.

Hot cooked meals are back

The hot-cooked-meal component under the Mathru Poorna scheme will be restored at anganwadi centres across the state, following concerns that the programme has drifted from its original objective. The CM said the scheme was originally designed to provide nutritious hot meals to pregnant and lactating women at anganwadi centres to prevent anaemia and malnutrition. However, over the years, the programme shifted towards distributing take-home ration (THR), which officials say has diluted its intended impact.

90 days of maternity leave in colleges



Women guest lecturers working in govt first-grade colleges, polytechnics, and engineering colleges will be granted 90 days of maternity leave from the next academic year. The move is expected to benefit thousands of women guest lecturers across the state, who earlier did not have a clear maternity leave provision and often faced difficulties balancing work and childcare.

Between numbers, can we get a budget for B'luru?

Pavan Srinath

GUEST COLUMN

Bengaluru entered a new era of city governance in 2025, with the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) and five city corporations being born out of the 18-year-old Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP). The Karnataka Budget highlighted the same and spoke about making Bengaluru the world's most liveable city, while outlining several large projects undertaken in 2025-26.

Karnataka will spend nearly Rs 4.5 trillion in the coming fiscal, amounting to about Rs 60,900 per person. BBMP last year budgeted a more modest Rs 199 billion — about Rs 13,500 per person. Of course, beyond BBMP, the BWSSB, Bescom, BDA, BMRDA, state and traffic police, and others spend money for the city of Bengaluru — but it remains a mystery to Bengalureans how public resources are being used for the city, and for what purposes. The state budget only provides a few clues. Overall, the urban water supply and sanitation budget in the state fell by 9.7% this year, compared to last year's revised estimates. The rest of the urban development budget also shrank by 2.7% compared with the last revised estimates — not counting the State Finance Commission and the 16th Finance Commission's allocations for cities.

Reading the budget lines for specific allocations to Bengaluru, funds for 'Capital Support to Special Infrastructure Projects of Bengaluru' have stayed flat at Rs 3,000 crore per year over the past three years. Support to BMTC has seen the highest increase — 66% over the last fiscal, amounting to Rs 807 crore — with the increase likely for the expansion and electrification of the bus fleet and bus depots.

The budget lines give us these precious few details, and the budget speech mentions a few more — including how city corporations in Bengaluru can avail municipal bonds, or how the city will have a Revised Master Plan and a Comprehensive Mobility Plan in place by the end of 2027.

LIVE SHOW: Passengers at Kempegowda bus station watch the budget

TOI

For Bengaluru's residents to feel confident that we have truly entered a new era of the megacity's governance, we need to see transparent budgets for GBA, the five city corporations, and the city's service delivery agencies, over the next few weeks. We need to see how each of the city administrations is faring in collecting its own revenue, and how much support they will receive from the state and Union govts. For example, we need to see how the Rs 1,225 crore spent this year on ward-level roads and infrastructure has benefited the 369 new wards in the city. We need to understand which wards have spent what amounts, and whether the city's outer wards are able to catch up to their infrastructure deficits.

The new Bengaluru's dynamic administrators have a unique opportunity to build common cause with the citizens for the transformation of the city. This can start with the city's budgets and openness.

— The writer is a researcher with WELL Labs, a water systems transformation group based in Bengaluru. Views are personal.

Govt plans to raise toast to alcohol-linked tourism

Breweries Will Be Allowed 24-hour Ops

TEAM TOI

With the rollout of an alcohol-in-beverage (AIB)-based excise duty system from April, Karnataka aims to modernise the excise system, improve transparency, simplify pricing and promote ease-of-doing business.

Industry representatives welcomed the policy that is expected to bring down prices of beer and wine. A spokesperson for United Breweries said, "Beer has significant growth potential in Karnataka, and we appreciate the govt's intent to strengthen the regulatory and policy framework for the sector." Share prices of both United Spirits and United Breweries surged after the announcement.

Sanjit Padhi, CEO of International Spirits and Wines Association of India, added, "We welcome Karnataka's move to free up liquor pricing. Reducing slabs to 8 offers brands flexibility to set consumer prices. While the final tax structure is pending, we hope a stable policy could boost investment and premiumisation, shifting consumers from lower-end products toward higher-value options."

The govt also plans to promote alcohol-linked tourism, allowing tasting sessions and on-site sales at distilleries and breweries. Distilleries and breweries will be allowed 24-hour operations, and beer labels will no longer require mandatory disclosure of malt and sugar content.

According to Siddaramaiah, a resource mobilisation committee will submit a draft report outlining the principles for a modern excise taxation and alcohol regulatory framework. Reforms requiring legislative approval will be introduced through a bill. Tech-driven systems will replace physical escorts for liquor dispatches, including geo-fenced e-locks and blockchain-based digital tracking. Manufacturing licences will be auto-renewed, while some licences will be auto-generated online.

The chief minister said the excise department will focus on taxation and compliance, while the health department will address social costs through public health, de-addiction and rehabilitation initiatives.

The announcement comes amid political controversy over alleged Rs 5,000-crore corruption in the excise department. Opposition parties BJP and JD(S) held a day-and-night protest outside Vidhana Soudha on Feb 4 demanding the resignation of excise minister RB Timmapur over allegations of bribery, which he has denied.

Karnataka Wine Merchants' Association has alleged bribery in the issuance of CL-7 licences, claiming up to Rs 2 crore was demanded in Bengaluru.

> The alcohol-in-beverage based taxation is a historic milestone and a beacon for excise policy reforms across India. Linking of taxation with quantity of alcohol in the product is based on the premise that the product to be taxed is alcohol and not water. It is widely followed all over the world now and is encouraged by health bodies such as WHO. By adopting the need to optimise revenue and public health goals of moderation, the govt has reinforced the state's image as a progressive reformist leader in country
> **Vinod Giri** | DIRECTOR GENERAL, BREWERS ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

WE ARE STRENGTHENING AI ECOSYSTEM: PRIYANK

As Karnataka enters its Deeptech Decade, the state is focused on democratising AI across regions and sectors. "Through this budget, we are strengthening the AI ecosystem across advanced research, talent development and startup innovation. Initiatives such as BRAINz, Bengaluru Robotics and AI Innovation Zone and the regional AI centres of excellence will anchor a new phase of collaboration between academia, research institutions and industry, positioning Karnataka at the forefront of global AI and deep-tech innovation," said Priyank Kharge, IT-BT minister

RPF dog helps recover drugs worth ₹12 lakh from Cantt station

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: During routine patrolling at Cantonment station Thursday evening, Railway Protection Force (RPF) sniffer dog Bagheera helped the team seize ganja worth Rs 12 lakh from three Odisha youngsters.

On seeing the dog, the men became nervous and behaved in a suspicious manner, according to RPF. The team enquired about the contents of their bags, which were found wrapped with cello tape, and the accused did not give a satisfactory reply. "During our rounds on platform number 1 at 5pm, Bagheera noticed the three youths with their bags. They started to panic on seeing the dog, following which he barked at them continuously," an RPF officer said.

A case was registered against Rajshekhar Behar, 25, Samantha Mallik, 23, and Ahish Gandha, who were carrying three bags containing ganja. Nelamangala resident Adli Khan, 30, who was supposed to pick up the contraband, was arrested too. RPF sources said the smugglers arrived in Bengaluru on SMVT Bengaluru–Howrah Duronto Express and later went to Cantonment station to hand over the package.

Ganja smuggling via trains is on the rise, with a 269% surge in seizures by South Western Railway (SWR) zone last year alone.

ALMANAC (7.3.2026)

Kumbha Masa 23 Shri Vishvavasu Nama Samvatsara – Uttarayana – Shishira Ritu - Tithi: Phalguna Krishna Chaturthi h. 19-18 Nakshatra: Chitra h. 11-16 Yoga: Vriddhi h. 6-53. 17 Ramadan Kali Day 1872641
Rahu Kalam 9am-10am
— KL Vidya Shankara Somayaji

K'taka shines in UPSC exam as 22 make the cut

Pavan Kumar Pateel | TNN

Bengaluru: As many as 22 candidates from Karnataka have cleared the prestigious Civil Services Examination-2025 conducted by Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), with two of them securing ranks within the top 100 in the all-India list.

Out of 958 candidates selected nationwide, the success of Karnataka's aspirants once again highlighted the state's strong presence in one of the country's toughest competitive examinations.

Topping the list from Karnataka is Kiran Kamate from Hattaravat village in Chikkodi taluk of Belagavi district, who secured 53rd rank.

Sandeep Badad from Yadgir district secured 82nd rank, becoming the second-highest-ranked candidate from the state.

Kiran prepared for UPSC examination for several years while working as a junior engineer in the public works department (PWD) in Bengaluru. Managing a demanding full-time job alongside rigorous preparation for the exam, his perseverance eventually paid off. "Hard work truly is rewarding. I stayed focused on consistent preparation during my service, and it is a dream come true to make my state proud," Kiran said.

Sandeep Badad resigned from his job at a private company in Bengaluru to focus on his goal after two attempts at UPSC examination while being employed were unsuccessful.

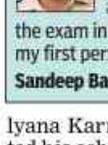
Originally from Yadgir in the Kalyana Karnataka region, he completed his schooling at Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya before pursuing electronics and communication engineering at Dr Ambedkar Institute of Technology. "With the blessings of my parents and siblings and a lot of hard work, I cleared the exam in my final attempt and attended my first personality test," he said.

Another achiever is Vishakha Kadam, daughter of a doctor-couple from Mangaluru. She secured 504th rank and is currently serving in Indian Railways Management Services (IRMS). Vishakha cleared the examination on her fourth attempt, making a significant improvement from her 962nd rank in her third attempt.

A graduate of National Law University Kolkata, she credited her success to choosing geography as her optional subject.

> Hard work truly pays off. I stayed focused on consistent preparation during service, and it is a dream come true to make my state proud
> **Kiran Kamate** | 53RD RANK HOLDER

> I tried twice while working but could not clear the exam. Later, I decided to resign from my job and focus completely on exam preparation. With the blessings of my parents and siblings and a lot of hard work, I cleared the exam in my final attempt and attended my first personality test
> **Sandeep Badad** | 82ND RANK HOLDER



FDI flow into state up 2.6 times in first half of year: CM

▶ Continued from page 1

The CM said foreign direct investment (FDI) flows into the state had risen by 2.6 times in the first half of the year — compared to the corresponding period in the previous year — and accounted for more than a quarter of India's FDI flows, indicating the state's growing attractiveness as an investment destination.

In last year's budget, urban development and public works were the big beneficiaries. Urban development was also the one item that didn't see any cut during the year; on the contrary, Siddaramaiah provided additional funds on top of the budgeted figure – probably driven by the upcoming corporation elections in Bengaluru. These funds explain the widespread white-topping of roads, building of flyovers, and sewerage and lake works in the city.

What got substantial funds, what didn't

For the coming year, while urban development and public works continue to get substantial funds – this will help, for instance, the proposed new corridor linking Nelamangala and Bidadi – the focus is on water supply and sanitation. The capital expenditure allocation for this is up by 72%, and revenue expenditure allocation by 45%. These should help speed up drinking water projects like Yettinahole and Mekedatu, both of which will help Bengaluru and surrounding areas.

Road transport, and roads and bridges, too, get substantial increases in allocations.

Areas like education, medical & public health, social security & welfare, and power are traditionally among the big budget items, and continue to be, but none of them have received a significant increase for the coming year. There's no cut in welfare expenditures, which suggests the five guarantees will continue without much change.

Given the assumption of a 14% rise in revenue receipts, Siddaramaiah has managed to keep the fiscal deficit at 2.95% of state GDP, just below the 3% limit mandated under Karnataka Fiscal Responsibility Act. If those receipts fall short, he will once again have to cut expenditures or borrow more from the market.

Campus elections set to return

The CM announced reintroduction of campus politics. He said student union elections will be held "to foster leadership, responsibility and democratic values among students". He also announced implementation of the Rohith Vemula Act across higher educational institutions.

Boost for ITI students

ITI students will be taught two additional subjects and will be given PU certificates to promote higher education and employment. Aakash Sethi, CEO, Quest Alliance, said: "While adding two additional subjects is a welcome move, the real need of the hour is to provide more career guidance and future skills so that learners are able to choose trades and subjects that are in line with their interests and have the skills to pursue those trades and careers."

Documenting Dalit literature

To mark the 50th anniversary of Dalit literature movement, govt will publish a book titled 'Ardhashatamanada Dalita Sahitya', compiling works of noted Dalit poet Siddalingaiah and other Dalit writers from the past five decades.

The CM announced Rs 1 crore for the initiative, which aims to document and celebrate the contribution of Dalit literature to Karnataka's cultural and social discourse.

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The main talk will be delivered by Smt. Joyati Kapur, Founder Working President and Sri Shantanu Kapur, Founder Member and Senior Advisor. Smt Joyati Kapur and Sri Shantanu Kapur are the oldest, closest disciples of Venerable Gurudeva Mahamahopadhyaya Yogacharya Dr. Ashoke Kumar Chatterjee. They have been able to glean the most subtle aspects of Kriyayoga through their Kriyayoga sadhana of 40 years and their close proximity to Venerable Gurudeva.

For those interested in Kriyayoga initiation, registration forms can be filled at the venue and the registration fee paid online.

The talks will be followed by a Q&A Session.

Light refreshments will be served at the venue.

Date : March 7, 2026
Time : 6 pm to 9 pm
Venue : Banquet Hall, Chancery Hotel, 10/6 Lavelle Road, Bangalore.

Please contact for further details:
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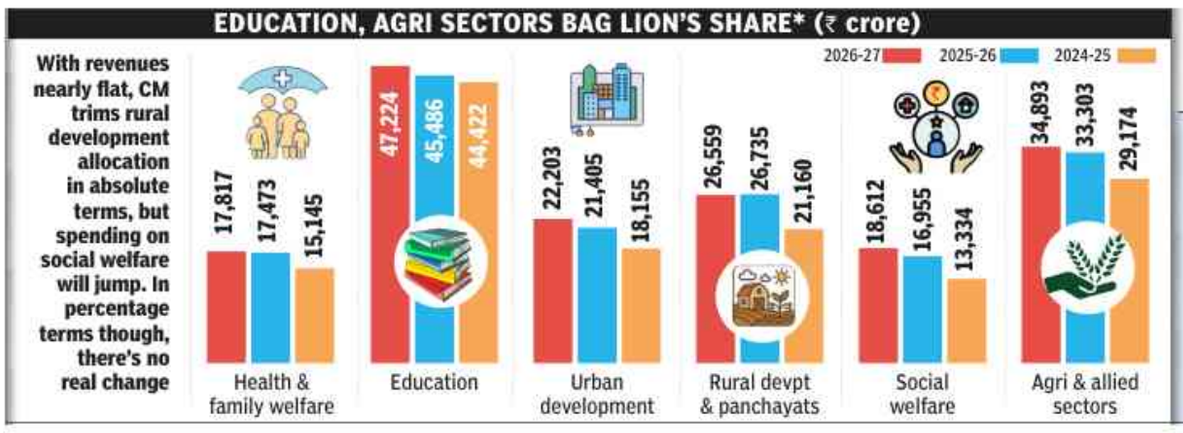
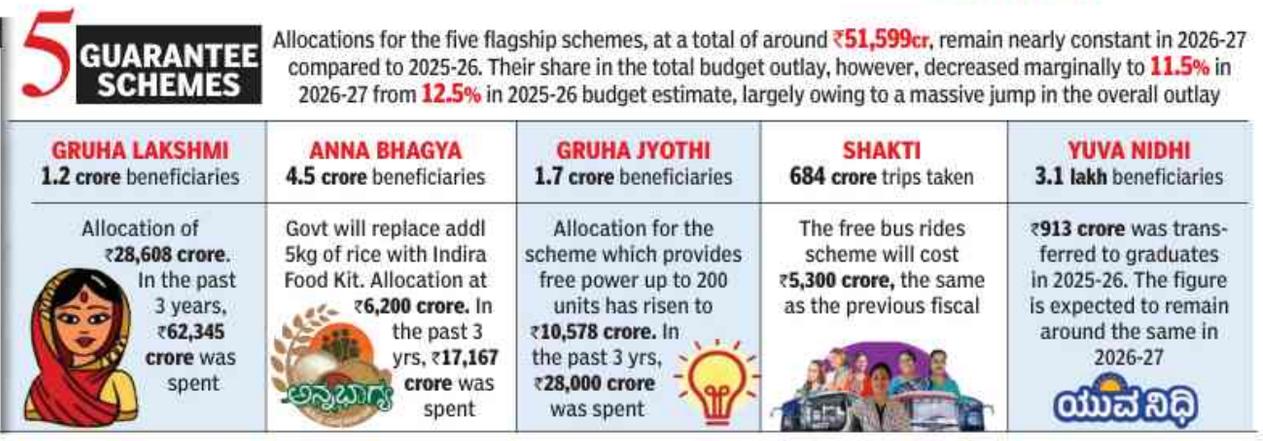




Target Raised Despite Revenue Shortfall | 15k Teachers To Be Hired In New Fiscal | Silk Parks To Be Set Up In Five Cities

Facing flak on jobs, CM lays out roadman for 56k posts

TEAM TOI

Amid growing criticism over rising unemployment and protests over govt posts being interminably vacant, chief minister Siddaramaiah Friday outlined his govt's plans to fill more than 56,000 vacancies across departments, providing a detailed sector-wise breakdown of the proposed recruitment.

He had earlier announced a plan to fill 56,432 posts. On Friday, he gave details on how the govt would go about the process, and the departments where posts would be filled.

Last week, the govt faced huge protests in Dharwad from job aspirants over delays in filling vacancies, which had turned violent. Siddaramaiah himself has repeatedly criticised the Centre over rising unemployment in the country and questioned BJP over what he has described as "unfulfilled job promises".

In his opening remarks during his budget speech, Siddaramaiah said: "We are strengthening the administrative system by filling vacant posts in major departments. In line with our election manifesto, employment generation remains a priority..."

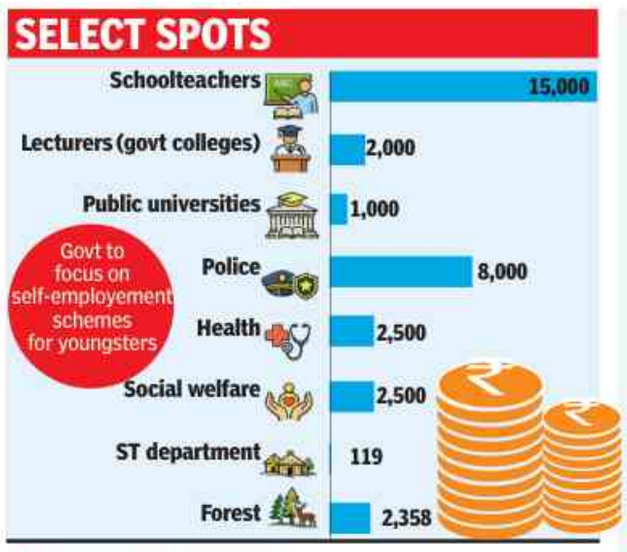
The govt will fill 56,432 posts during the 2026-27 fiscal across education, forests, home and health departments. The education sector will account for the largest share with 15,000 teachers to be hired. In addition, the govt will recruit 2,000 lecturers in colleges and another 1,000 faculty members in public universities.

To expand employment for workers in the unorganised sector, the govt will introduce an online employment exchange called 'Kayaka Bhagya'. The platform, which has been allocated Rs 5 crore, will connect workers with skill-based job opportunities.

Siddaramaiah also said his govt would focus on creating "self-employment" opportunities for youth — by offering financial assistance schemes for unemployed youth to start small businesses. Under entrepreneurship development programmes run by various govt corporations, beneficiaries from SC, ST, minority and women categories will be eligible for subsidised financial assistance.

Under these schemes, unemployed youth can get financial assistance up to 75% of the unit cost, with a maximum subsidy of Rs 4 lakh for STs and Rs 3 lakh for minorities. The support is intended for ventures such as fast food trucks, mobile kitchens, and food kiosks. A separate loan facility of up to Rs 5 lakh at 4% interest has also been proposed to help individuals establish 'modern laundries' as a self-employment option. Recognising employment opportunities for women trained in technical trades, Siddaramaiah also announced a waiver for women graduating from industrial training institutes.

For students preparing for competitive exams and higher education, the govt will introduce 'Vidhyarthi Indira Canteens'. An extension of Indira Canteens that provide affordable meals to urban poor, these canteens will cater specifically to students. Four such canteens will be opened in Dharwad and Bengaluru, two cities that attract a large number of students.



> Youth have been protesting over lack of govt job opportunities, yet the budget offers no concrete solution other than mere announcements
> **R Ashoka** | OPPOSITION LEADER

> These announcements are welcome, but the govt must publish a calendar of events. If not, they would only be an eyewash
> **R Kanthakumar** | PRESIDENT, ALL KARNATAKA STATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Shopping malls for farmers

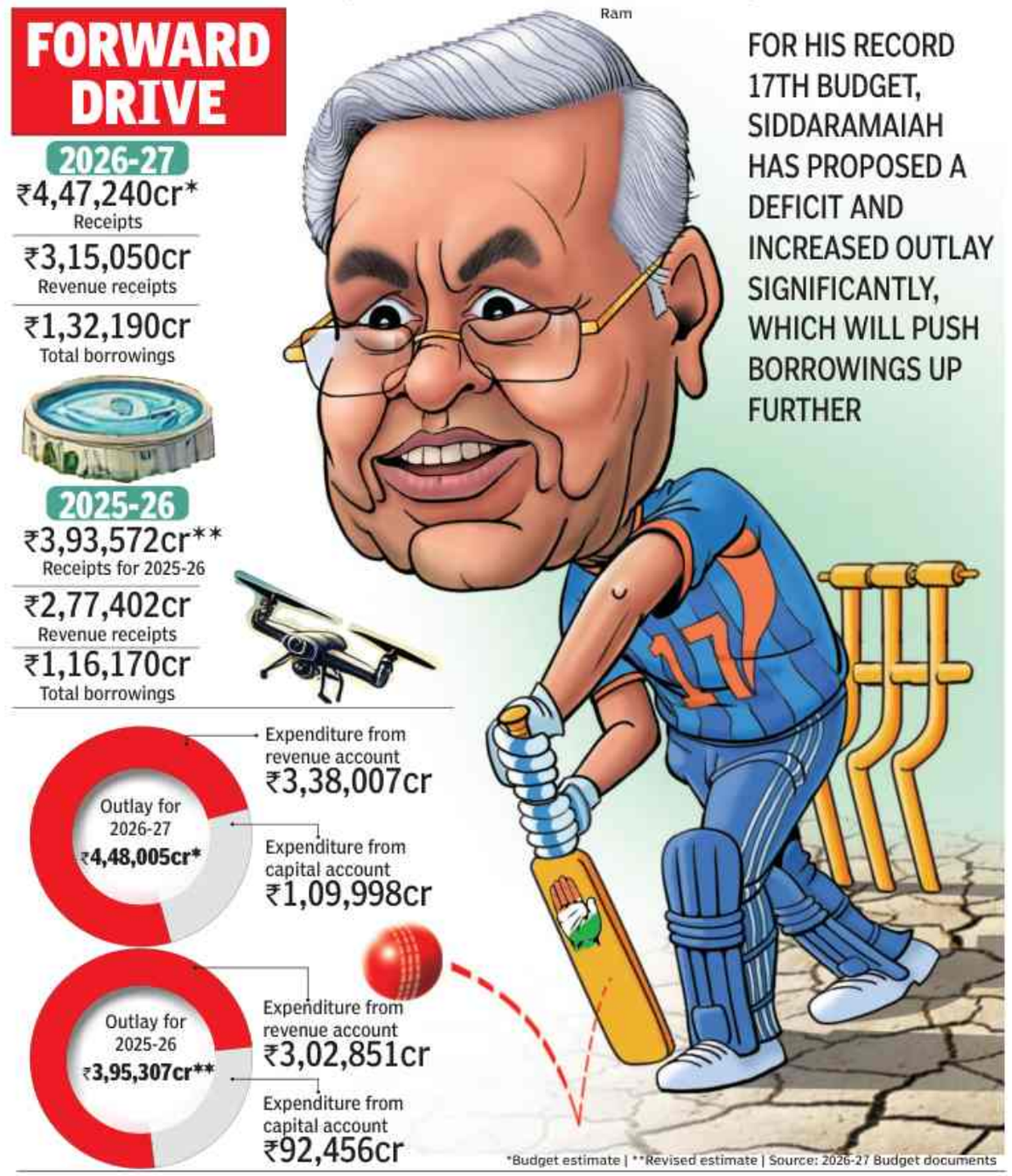
TEAM TOI

Siddaramaiah announced a series of steps aimed at strengthening agriculture and allied sectors, including novel 'raitha' malls for farmers, silk parks in key sericulture hubs and 'matsya darshinis' to promote fish consumption.

'Raitha malls' are envisioned as one-stop centres for farmers to access essential agricultural inputs. "The aim is to provide farmers with high-quality agricultural inputs at affordable rates and mitigate market uncertainty," budget documents state. Mysore Sales International Ltd will set up the malls on a pilot basis in all taluks of Kolar district. Farmers can buy seeds, pesticides, fertiliser and implements — all in one place.

To govt will establish silk parks in Ramanagara, Sidlaghatta, Haveri, Tandavpura (Mysuru), and Kalaburagi . 'Matsya darshinis' in four cities — Belagavi, Davanagere, Hubballi and Chikkamagaluru — will ensure clean and quality fish products.

Under agriculture, the govt highlighted the adoption of the "alternate wetting and drying" (AWD) irrigation to improve water-use efficiency in paddy cultivation. To encourage sheep and goat rearing in Belagavi and Kalaburagi and promote dairy farming, the govt will provide a 25% subsidy to 10,000 farmers to buy cattle. The scheme has been allocated Rs 40 crore.



Ambitious revenue target: Is stage set for year-end revision?

TEAM TOI

Chief minister Siddaramaiah has set a much higher revenue target for 2026-27 despite a significant shortfall in the current fiscal, raising questions over how the govt plans to bridge the gap without raising taxes.

The widening gap between projections and actual collections in 2025-26 has forced the govt to scale down its expectations with the revenue estimate of Rs 2,08,100 crore for the ongoing fiscal has now been revised to Rs 1,94,100 crore.

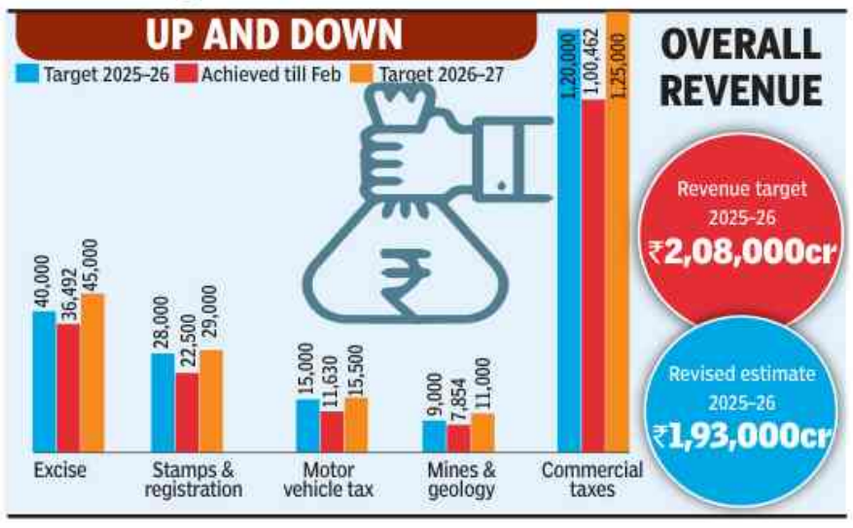
Siddaramaiah has raised the revenue target for the forthcoming fiscal to Rs 2,20,000 crore, a 13.5% increase over the revised estimate. Yet, the budget did not propose fresh taxes or increase in existing rates.

Experts say the higher target could play out in three ways: The govt may eventually raise tax rates; revenue buoyancy driven by higher consumption could help meet the target; or the estimates may again be revised downward later in the year.

"It has become a trend for govts to make ambitious budget estimates and revise it downwards towards the end of the financial year," said BDA Satya Babu Bose, director, Centre for Rural Development and Study. "Even the BJP-led central govt is no exception. Going by the pattern since Congress formed the govt in 2023 in Karnataka, one should not be surprised to see the same trend play out at the end of 2026-27."

Experts say projecting higher revenue in budget estimates enhances the govt's borrowing capacity. The shortfall in property-related revenue reflects the challenge. Siddaramaiah had projected Rs 28,000 crore from property registrations in 2025-26, but the stamps and registration department collected only Rs 22,629 crore, forcing the govt to revise the estimate to Rs 24,000 crore.

For 2026-27, the target has been increased to a colossal Rs 29,000 crore. Realtors say this could lead to a revision in guidance value — the minimum property price fixed by the govt on which 5% stamp duty and 1.5% registration charge are levied.



Verses & quotes from across years

Departing from the practice of quoting literary figures, the CM Friday, chose to draw lines from works of relatively lesser-known writers associated with the 12th-century Sharana movement, including Akkamma and Shivalenka Manchanna during his budget speech. It also featured reflections from BR Ambedkar and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen.

EXTRA COVER

Nod for Buddhist Devpt Corporation

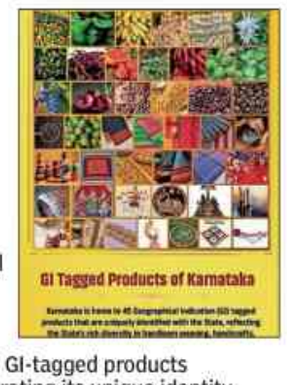
The govt will establish a Buddhist Development Corporation to promote welfare and development of the Buddhist community. As part of the initiative, Dhammacharis serving in viharas will receive a monthly honorarium of Rs 6,000. The move follows long-standing demands from the community for financial assistance to religious functionaries engaged in social and community services. Archakas in registered Jain basadis and to pesh imam and muezzins in Waqf-registered mosques already receive similar honorariums. The govt also announced the formation Karnataka Adivasi Development Corporation to support vulnerable tribal communities. Pilgrims travelling to Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Temple will receive financial assistance of Rs 5,000 each. The assistance will be transferred directly to beneficiaries' bank accounts. The govt has earmarked Rs 5 crore for the scheme.

Govt to forge ahead with Mekedatu

Siddaramaiah said the state would go ahead with key irrigation and drinking water projects, including the long-pending Mekedatu balancing reservoir on the Cauvery River, while continuing efforts to secure approvals and resolve disputes with neighbouring states. He said the dismissal of petitions filed by Tamil Nadu in the Supreme Court was a "significant legal victory", and that a revised DPR along with a proposal for forest clearance would soon be submitted to the Centre. He also announced progress in the Yettinahole Comprehensive Drinking Water Project and the Upper Bhadra Project, while work on replacing gates at the Tungabhadra Dam and compensation for raising the height of Almatti Dam height were also highlighted.

Budget book, a cultural showcase

Over the past few years, CM Siddaramaiah has turned the design of the Budget book into a visual narrative celebrating Karnataka's heritage and values. The 2024–25 volume featured the Preamble of the Constitution, symbolising democratic ideals and constitutional values. In 2025–26, the design drew inspiration from Karnataka's rich sculptural and architectural heritage, showcasing intricate artistic patterns that reflected the state's cultural legacy. This year, the book showcased all 45 GI-tagged products associated with the state, celebrating its unique identity.



Property registration to be streamlined

TEAM TOI

The govt plans to set up five 'mega registration centres' of global standards under the PPP model to streamline and modernise property registration services.

Chief minister Siddaramaiah said the centres will be modelled on Passport Seva Kendras and will improve access and efficiency in registration services. The initiative is part of a broader effort to make sub-registrar offices people-friendly.

Also, 207 sub-registrar offices will be digitised to ensure long-term storage and preservation of legacy documents that date back prior to 2003. One sub-registrar office in each district will be upgraded into a 'registration guarantee centre'. The govt will also upgrade the land records system to Bhoomi 8.0 at a cost of Rs 50 crore and integrate it with more than 10 departments.

To preserve historical land data, some of which is over 160 years old, the govt will establish modern record rooms at a cost of Rs 72 crore. As part of this effort, more than 50 lakh Tippans — original field-book style records containing detailed measurements taken during initial settlement surveys — and field measurement books along with over one crore atlases will be digitised using GIS technology.

Live streaming and video conferencing facilities will be introduced in all revenue courts, and Kaveri registration software will be upgraded at a cost of Rs 65 crore. The Registration Act was amended in 2025 to allow remote registration and the CM another amendment enabling notified private institutions to conduct remote registrations has been sent for the President's assent.

GSDP on strong wicket; per capita income up to ₹2.2L

TEAM TOI

Karnataka's gross state domestic product (GSDP) at constant prices is estimated to grow by nearly Rs 1.3 lakh crore, or 8.1%, to touch more than Rs 17.2 lakh crore in 2025-26 — up from over Rs 15.9 lakh crore the previous year, the Economic Survey released Friday states.

During his budget presentation, Siddaramaiah said the state's GSDP surpasses the national growth rate of 7.4%. "This performance was supported by broad-based sectoral growth and reflects the state's diversified and stable growth pattern," he said.

The estimated GSDP growth is 1.2 percentage points higher than the 7.3% in 2024-25, a year that had seen a dip in growth from 8.2% in 2023-24. Sector-wise analysis pegs service sector growth at 8.1%, industry sector at 6.7%, agriculture sector at 9.1%, while manufacturing is expected to grow at 7.2%.

At current prices, GSDP's advanced estimates in nominal terms stand at over Rs 32.8 lakh crore in 2025-26, up from around Rs 29 lakh crore in 2024-25. For a state reeling under revenue stress, the high GSDP allows for higher borrowings while remaining within the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management framework which caps total liabilities at 25% of GSDP.

The state's overall exports increased by 13.8% in 2025-26, compared to 2024-25. Export of agricultural commodities rose from $2,043.7 million to $2,457.4 million, up 20%. "This reflects improved competitiveness, diversification and global integration of the state's production base," the survey read.

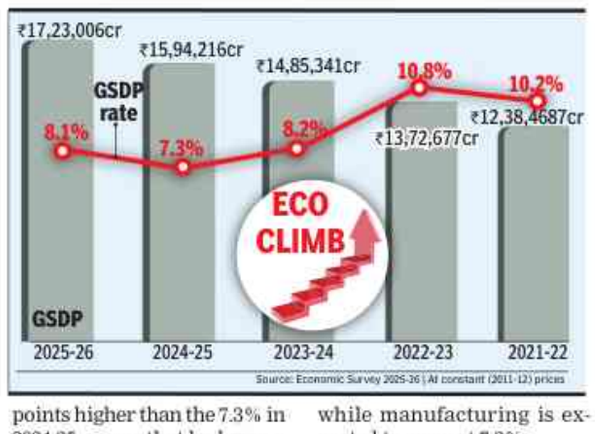
"Total receipts are expected to increase by 13.9%, rising from Rs 3.5 lakh crore to above Rs 4 lakh crore. Revenue receipts are expected to grow 13.4% from Rs 2.5 lakh crore to Rs 2.9 lakh crore, while capital receipts are expected to grow 15.2% from Rs 1 lakh crore to nearly Rs 1.2 lakh crore," the Survey said.

However, final estimates for the fiscal, which will end March 31, will give more clarity on actual numbers for the year.

Pegged at Rs 4.3 lakh, Karnataka's per-capita income (PCI) at current prices is 97% higher than India's Rs 2.2 lakh figure for the year. "Per capita income increased from Rs 3.8 lakh in 2024-25, showing a growth of 12.2% at current prices. At constant prices, it increased from Rs 2 lakh to Rs 2.2 lakh, registering a growth of 7.4%," the Survey read.

While a break-up of district-wise PCI for 2025-26 wasn't estimated, numbers for 2024-25 show that only one district (Kalaburagi) has a PCI of less than Rs 1.5 lakh. Kalaburagi had recorded a PCI of over Rs 1.4 lakh in 2024-25, which is expected to have crossed Rs 1.5 lakh in the current fiscal.

The survey said the state will align GSDP sectors with sustainable development goals (SDGs), in line with the UN's 2030 agenda — for which four years remain — while also promoting SDG implementation by private sector through the ESG (environmental/social/governance) framework.



TIMES NATION

THE TIMES OF INDIA, BENGALURU | SATURDAY, MARCH 7, 2026

FADNAVIS ANNOUNCES ₹23,487-CRORE METRO LINE TO GATEWAY OF INDIA, TUNNELS IN MUMBAI AND PUNE

CM PINARAYI VIJAYAN FLAGS OFF FIRST BLAST FOR ANAKAMPOYIL-KALLADI-MEPPADI TUNNEL PROJECT

AP to ban social media access for kids under 13

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Vijayawada: Andhra Pradesh CM N Chandrababu Naidu announced in the assembly Friday that the TDP-led govt would roll out restrictions for social media access by kids under 13 within 90 days, coinciding with Congress-governed Karnataka moving to ban social media access by children below 16.

Naidu said the proposal was based on recommendations by IT and HRD minister Nara Lokesh, who also identified the 13-16 age group for possible regulation. Naidu said a decision on that cohort would follow "wider consultations".

The state had previously constituted a group of ministers to examine policy options, including holding multiple rounds of discussions with stakeholders and studying regulations in other countries. Social media intermediaries have been invited to the next meeting.

Since a blanket ban would be difficult to enforce, the govt is pressing platforms to adopt more stringent age-verification norms at the point of account creation

Since a blanket ban would be difficult to enforce, the govt is pressing platforms to adopt more stringent age-verification norms at the point of account creation, including proof of identity and age. Lokesh also proposed more advanced content-filtering algorithms to prevent age-inappropriate material reaching younger users.

State home minister V Anitha, part of the ministerial group, told TOI that the Naidu govt was taking a multi-pronged approach, including legislation that, if required, would be forwarded to the Union govt for approval.

Lokesh suggested Karnataka's announcement of similar restrictions wasn't an original idea. "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Glad to see Karnataka considering restrictions on social media for those under 16, an idea we proposed earlier in Andhra Pradesh," he wrote on X.

The remark follows a series of public spats between Lokesh and Karnataka ministers over which state is more investment-friendly.

Couple held for voyeurism at TISS campus

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Guwahati: Police have arrested a couple in connection with the Feb 27 incident at Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS) here in which a camera was found concealed inside a soapbox in the bathroom of the girls' hostel on the campus. The two arrested have been identified as Anushree Saikia, 23, a student at the institute, and her boyfriend Mridupawan Bora, 25.

Bora is not a TISS student.

"The woman is a student at TISS and was staying in the hostel where the incident took place. During probe, we found they have been involved in similar incidents earlier. We have obtained evidence," said DCP (west) Numal Mahatta.

Mahatta said the two were arrested on Tuesday. They were produced in a court the next day and remanded to four-day police custody.

Nitish Kumar firm on RS move, Nishant to join JDU tomorrow

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@Jduonline

CM Nitish Kumar during the party meeting in Patna on Friday

Patna: Nishant Kumar is set to join Janata Dal United in a grand political debut on March 8, the party announced on Friday even as his father Nitish Kumar made it clear that his decision to move to Rajya Sabha and step down as Bihar chief minister was his own and irreversible.

At a key JDU meet at Nitish's official residence, a resolution was moved by national working president Sanjay Jha for felicitating the entry of Nishant, who was earlier reluctant to the idea of joining politics but relented after discussions with his father, party supporters and other family members. "Resolution was unanimously endorsed by all MLCs and MLAs, and Sanjay Jha later announced the historic decision," JDU spokesperson Neeraj Kumar said.

There is intense speculation that the low-profile Nishant — an alumnus of Jharkhand engineering institute BIT Mesra — could be appointed deputy CM in a new NDA govt or be given a key organisational role to prevent a leadership vacuum if Nitish shifts to Delhi. The move is significant as Nitish long took a strong stand against dynastic politics but is now seeing his only son set to enter public life at age 50. "The chief minister gave the green signal for Nishant's entry," JDU senior Vijay Choudhary said. Nishant will hit the ground running after his entry, touring Bihar to interact with party functionaries and workers, spokesperson Neeraj said.

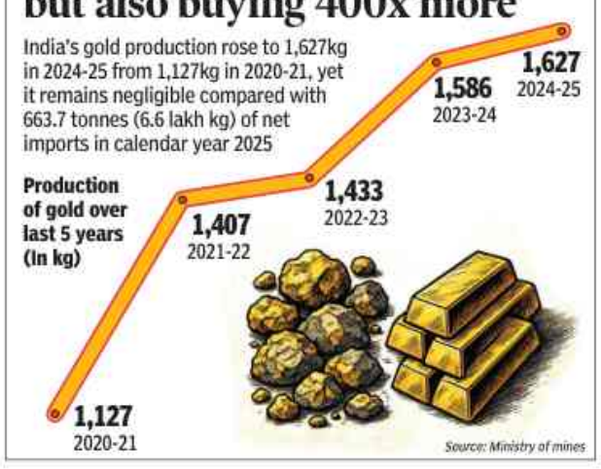
Surgeries at hotel: Homeopath held

Chennai: The Tamil Nadu police arrested a Mumbai-based homeopathic doctor and her assistant, who were preparing to conduct unauthorized surgical procedures out of a hotel in the city on Wednesday. Poonam Sharma, 54, was intercepted in a raid at the hotel where she set up a makeshift clinic to perform ear lobe repair surgeries. TNN

STATISTICS A slice of life in numbers

Gold: India is mining more, but also buying 400x more

India's gold production rose to 1,627kg in 2024-25 from 1,127kg in 2020-21, yet it remains negligible compared with 663.7 tonnes (6.6 lakh kg) of net imports in calendar year 2025



NH users who skip toll get 3 days to pay

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New Delhi: Highway users who fail to pay toll charges on NHs due to a faulty or blacklisted FASTag, insufficient balance or absence of a tag, will get 3 days to make the payment after receiving an e-notice. If payment is not made within this period, double the toll amount will be charged and all vehicle (registration certificate)-related services, such as change of ownership, transfer and renewal, will be suspended.

Details on procedure for e-notice for non-payment of toll charge will be notified in the next few days, a senior road transport ministry official said. The procedure to pay the pending toll charge and also to challenge it will be spelt out in the notification. "This is crucial as we start multi-lane free flow (MLFF), or barrier-less toll collection, on NH stretches. The first MLFF tolling is set for roll out at Choryasi in Gujarat," said an official.

So far, NHAI's electronic tolling entity IHMCL has bid out MLFF for 16 toll plazas. These include Gharaunda in Haryana, Mundka in Delhi, and Manoharpura, Shahjahanpur and Daulatpura in Rajasthan where the new system will be operational soon. TOI has learnt that govt will now bid out MLFF projects in bundles for accelerated implementation.

"The provision of e-notice is key to the success of MLFF as in this tolling system, vehicles will pass seamlessly and won't be stopped. The e-notice for failing to pay toll will mention double charge, but if vehicle owners pay within three days, there will be a 50% discount, meaning paying the exact toll," said an official.

Notice for resolution supported by 118 MPs from oppn

▶ Continued from page 1

Both BJP and Congress have issued whips to their respective Lok Sabha members, asking them to ensure their presence in the House as they seek to marshal maximum strength as a division of votes is expected.

While BJP's whip has called for a mandatory attendance of its MPs on the first two days, Congress's directive stands for the first three days. Rules allow Birla to be present in the House, while not occupying the Chair, and defend himself.

Lok Sabha's agenda for Monday cites the resolution moved by three Congress MPs — Mohammad Jawed, K Suresh and Mallu Ravi. The notice for resolution was supported by 118 MPs from Congress, Samajwadi Party and DMK, besides a few others.

Indians lead foreign buyers in Dubai realty

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: While the ongoing conflict in West Asia has rattled sentiment in the UAE real estate market, Indians were the largest foreign group investing in Dubai's residential property market last year. They bought homes worth an estimated Rs 85,000 crore to Rs 95,000 crore, according to Anarock Property Consultants.

The Emirate recorded nearly $250 billion, or roughly Rs 23 lakh crore, worth of real estate transactions across all asset classes in 2025. Indians' share of residential transactions in Dubai was 23% last year, Anarock said, adding that in 2023 this share was 12%, amounting to investments worth around Rs 37,000 crore. Among non-Arab investors, UK nationals and Chinese ranked second and third.

"Indian nationals account for roughly 20-22% of foreign property purchases in Dubai, making them the largest investor group," the Anarock report said. Factors include geographical proximity, the stability provided by the UAE Dirham's peg to the US Dollar and relatively attractive rental yields of 6% to 9%. "Most Indians bought apartments and villas as investment," said Prashant Thakur, Head, Research & Advisory at Anarock. Developers also offer rental management services. Rental yields in Dubai are about 6% to 8%, compared with 2-3% in India. Apartment prices in UAE typically range from Rs 2.5 crore to Rs 6 crore.

iStock

REALTY CHECK: Desis account for roughly 20-22% of foreign property purchases in Dubai

But geopolitical tensions could upset the property market. Reuters reported that shares of developers in Dubai and Abu Dhabi plunged on Wednesday. Experts said the sector has weathered several cycles, including a fall during the 2008 financial crisis.

Sarpanch gunned down at Moga gym; kin demand FIR against MLA

Bathinda: A village sarpanch was shot dead in a daylight attack at his private gym in Baghapurana town in Punjab's Moga district Friday, police said. He was the third sarpanch to be gunned down in Punjab since Jan. Moga SSP Ajay Gandhi said the attack allegedly stemmed from a personal rivalry.

Harwinder Singh alias Happy (37), sarpanch of Patto Hira Singh village, was targeted as he arrived at his fitness centre. Witnesses said Singh had just stepped out of his car around 11am, when three-four unidentified assailants approached and opened fire at him The assailants fled after the crime. Singh was rushed to Baghapurana civil hospital, where he succumbed.

A murder case was registered at Baghapurana police station. "We have identified the suspects and dispatched multiple teams to track them down. Based on our initial investigation, this is a case of personal enmity. We have found no gang-related angle at this stage, though the victim was facing half a dozen criminal cases," SSP Gandhi said. TNN

India's climate-health reporting stands out in global study

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Bengaluru: As climate change intensifies public health risks globally, Indian media, including TOI, has increasingly thrown the spotlight on the link between environmental shifts and human health.

A new study published in The Lancet Planetary Health has found that Indian news outlets are emerging as global frontrunners in climate-health journalism, surpassing coverage trends in both the US and China. According to the research, Indian outlets recorded the highest proportion of substantive climate-health coverage at 46.4%, compared to 31.3% in the US and 17% in China. The study, titled 'The evolution of news coverage about climate change as a health issue: a decadal analysis in China, India, and the USA', examined legacy media coverage across the three countries between 2012 and 2023. Researchers conducted a manual content analysis of articles from five mainstream newspapers and one news agency per country, sourced through archival databases. In India, **TOI** was among the five newspapers included in the sample.

Climate-health journalism was defined as news content that substantively connects climate change to human health outcomes or health-related actions. To identify the relevant articles, researchers screened headlines and lead paragraphs for climate-related keywords such as "climate change" and "global warming". These articles were then cross-searched for public health terms, including health, disease, death, illness, injury, infection and wellbeing. This process generated 5,173 potentially relevant articles — 1,473 from China, 1,487 from India and 2,213 from the US. After systematic sampling and manual validation, the final dataset comprised 324 articles: 50 from China and 137 each from India and the US.

While only 5.8% of India's climate-related articles contained public-health keywords — lower than the US (7.3%) and significantly below China (18.6%) — manual validation revealed that China's higher keyword overlap did not translate into stronger health-focused storytelling. In contrast, India's selectively framed pool demonstrated greater editorial intent in bringing public-health implications front and centre.

Lamichhane: TV star who built RSP, redefined Nepal politics

Anti-Corruption Pitch Shot Him To Fame

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Reuters

PM-hopeful Balendra Shah, popularly known as 'Balen', with RSP chief Rabi Lamichhane during the campaign trail

Kathmandu: Few politicians in Nepal rose as quickly as Rabi Lamichhane, 50. Before politics, he was already one of Nepal's most recognisable faces — a loud, brash TV news presenter whose anti-corruption pitch made him a household name. When he launched Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) just before the 2022 election, he offered a simple promise: the old parties had failed and a cleaner alternative had arrived. In the first parliamentary election since the Sept 2025 Gen Z uprising, that promise found its biggest audience yet.

Rabi's appeal rested on distance from Nepal's traditional leadership. He did not come up through the party structures, but through the small screen, where outrage was not hidden and grievance was turned into performance.

"He did not sell ideology. He sold impatience," an observer wrote in 2024.

That outsider image helped RSP rise fast. The party drew urban voters, younger Nepalis and citizens weary of coalition churn and familiar faces rotating through office.

Rabi became its organiser and most recognisable political asset. An analyst said in 2024 that his politics worked because it made anger look "immediate and usable".

Rabi, though, was never only an outsider. After RSP's first breakthrough, he moved quickly into power.

He backed coalition efforts by older parties and served under PM Pushpa Kamal Dahal as deputy PM and home minister, placing him inside the very system he had attacked on TV.

TOI in nepal

In Jan 2023, the Supreme Court of Nepal annulled his lawmaker status over invalid citizenship papers, forcing him out of office. He returned later, and in 2024 again held the home ministry as Nepal's alliances shifted.

It showed that Rabi spoke like a disruptor but dealt like a pragmatist. He was willing to bargain with the establishment when power came within reach. That instinct would shape his biggest political move. Then Sept 2025 changed the country. The immediate spark for the uprising was the social media ban, but it was a broader revolt against corruption, unemployment and impunity — what Rabi had spoken against as a TV presenter.

By then, Rabi's detention in a cooperative fraud case had already turned him into a political symbol for many supporters — proof, in their eyes, that challengers were pursued while the entrenched remained protected.

On Sept 9, during the unrest, he left Nakkhu jail in circumstances that remained disputed. Some accounts said protesters pulled him out.

Others said the authorities released him because the security situation had collapsed. "By then, he looked less like an accused politician than a vessel for public anger," an observer said in 2025.

The post-Sept mood soon found its biggest face in then Kathmandu mayor Balen Shah. If Rabi had built the party that could absorb anti-establishment anger, Balen gave that anger electoral force. Rabi was quick to recognise the opportunity and limit of his own appeal. When Balen joined RSP in Dec 2025, the arrangement reflected that balance: Balen would be the prime minister face if RSP won, while Rabi would remain party chief.

"Bringing Balen and his supporters into RSP fold was a very smart and strategic move," an analyst added.

Oli trails by huge margin, Balen 4x ahead

▶Continued from P1

Balen's last public remark came after polling on Thursday, when he praised interim PM Sushila Karki and wrote: "Under your leadership, democracy has triumphed today." The rejection of those that the Gen Z protests targeted was stark. In Jhapa-5, Oli was trailing so badly that Balen had at least four times the former's vote tally. Madhav Kumar Nepal, another veteran of Nepal's coalition era, was also swept aside.

Prachanda appeared to have held his ground. But even that survival came wrapped in decline. Contesting yet again from a new constituency after shifting seats across elections, he looked less like a revived force than the last veteran left standing. His daughter's struggle in Chitwan sharpened the message emerging elsewhere: old networks, family legacies and inherited political capital no longer guaranteed safety.

Baburam Bhattarai, the former PM who withdrew from Gorkha-2 at the last moment, had sensed early where the mood was heading. Explaining his exit in Jan, he said he would play "an advisory role beyond party politics" and continue supporting progressive and emerging forces from outside Parliament. He also said Nepal's democracy would remain incomplete unless it created "dignified, productive jobs at home" and moved faster on economic change. Seen against Friday's result, his withdrawal looked like an early recognition that the ground had shifted.

RAPID ASCENT

- 2013: **Rabi Lamichhane sets Guinness record for marathon TV talk show**; over 9 years, builds mass following as loud, anti-corruption TV face
- June 2022: **Quits TV, enters politics**, launches RSP as anti-old-party platform
- Nov 2022: **RSP shocks Nepal polls**; wins 20 seats, becomes 4th-largest party
- Dec 2022-Jan 2023: **RSP backs Prachanda govt**; Rabi becomes deputy PM, home minister
- Sept 9, 2025: **Rabi exits jail** amid unrest; becomes bigger anti-establishment symbol
- Dec 2025: **Balen Shah joins RSP; deal makes him PM face, keeps Rabi as party chief**
- March 6, 2026: **RSP sweeps polls**; Rabi wins Chitwan-2 seat

For many voters, Balen's rise captured a double break — from the traditional parties and their political style. Born in Kathmandu, he grew up in a lower middle-class household; his father, Ram Narayan Shah, was a govt ayurveda practitioner and his mother, Dhruvadevi Shah, a homemaker. He studied civil engineering at Himalayan WhiteHouse International College in Putalisadak, Kathmandu, and later received an MTech in structural engineering from Visvesvaraya Technological University in Karnataka, India.

Balen first entered national consciousness as a rapper whose songs took aim at corruption, political stagnation and inherited power. By this election he had acquired a rockstar-like popularity whose voice drowned everything and everyone else.

We voted for you, now get to work: Gen Z

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Kathmandu: For many young Nepalis, Friday's historic verdict came with a clear call for the Himalayan country's new leaders: 'We voted for you. Now get to work'.

In Kathmandu, there were no dhols or gulal left over from Holi to be sprayed in celebration. The city moved in its usual rhythm even as the scale of Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP)'s sweep became clear. The generation that drove the Sept 2025 uprising and forced a snap election said the "old parties had been punished", but the deeper issues that brought them onto the streets — corruption, unemployment, weak public services, nepotism, political impunity and the lack of opportunities — remained unresolved.

With 35-year-old Balen Shah set to become PM, many young voters and protest leaders said the mandate would mean little unless it translated into visible change.

Amrita Ban, 23, one of the activists at the forefront of the Sept protests, said the new leadership could not afford to repeat the old parties' habit of selling "false hope and false promises of turning Nepal into Switzerland". She said: "The old leadership failed because it did not deliver. The new ones have to prove themselves." For Ban, the first test would not be grand speeches or symbolic gestures, but whether people begin to feel change in everyday life. "What we are asking for is basic — an environment to live in our own country."

Niraj Adhikari, 28, a construction supervisor who returned from Qatar just in time to vote, said the result would matter only if it slowed outward migration. "It is now our duty to build this nation."

A sharper warning came from Majid Ansari, 25. "The verdict should not be treated as a blank cheque," he said. "We want criminal accountability for those responsible for the killing of Gen Z protesters and action on the Karki Commission findings into the Sept violence. We want rule of law, not the rule of men."

Others framed the verdict less as loyalty to a party than as a test for all of them. Prashant Thapa, 22, said, "The real test now is whether the winners move beyond rhetoric and improve public services." Bibek Rajbhandari, 24, said, "If they fail, voters will simply choose someone else."

If cogent, testimony of child survivor can be safely relied upon: HC

New Delhi: Delhi high court has underlined that even in the absence of corroboration of medical evidence, the testimony of a child survivor, as long as it was found to be cogent and reliable, could be safely relied upon.

In a recent verdict, it rejected the argument of a rape accused that since the mother of the minor survivor refused consent for the internal medical examination of the child, he should get the benefit of the same.

A bench of Justices Navin Chawla and Ravinder Dudeja found no merit in the argument and pointed out that the mother herself explained she did not wish the girl to undergo further trauma by being subjected to such a medical examination. "This explanation does not appear to be unnatural on the part of the mother. In any event, once the testimony of the victim is found to be truthful and consistent, the mere refusal to permit a medical examination cannot be fatal to the prosecution case," it noted.

The high court, however, set aside the conviction of the man under Indian Penal Code and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act for raping the minor and held him guilty of attempted sexual assault, reducing his sentence from 30 years' life to 10 years' imprisonment.

"We hold that the appellant is guilty of an attempt to commit aggravated penetrative sexual assault and is, therefore, liable to be punished under Section 18 of Pocso Act. While there is no doubt that even the slightest penetration..., without rupturing the hymen, would constitute aggravated penetrative sexual assault, however, from the above stray statement of the victim, we are unable to conclude that there was a penetrative sexual assault upon the victim in the present case," HC noted, modifying the punishment.

HIGH COURT SAYS

We hold that the appellant is guilty of an attempt to commit aggravated penetrative sexual assault and is, therefore, liable to be punished under Section 18 of the Pocso Act... However, from the statement of the victim, we are unable to conclude that there was a penetrative sexual assault

The trial court had accepted the stand of the prosecution that the accused, Vikas, sexually assaulted the six-year-old girl in 2018 and, based on her testimony, convicted him in 2021.

According to police, Vikas had recently shifted to the minor's neighbourhood and, one day, bolted the door when she was alone and assaulted her. TNN

Their courage and service will always be remembered: Rajnath condoles pilot deaths

▶Continued from page 1

Residents of nearby villages reported hearing a loud explosion as the jet, engulfed in flames, hurtled down the hillside. The debris was scattered across a large area.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh and Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma condoled the deaths. "Their courage and service to the nation will always be remembered with pride and gratitude," Singh said.

It was the second fatal Su-30MKI crash in the Northeast in eight years. On May 23, 2017, Sqn Ldr D Pankaj and Flt Lt S Achudev took off from Tezpur's Salonibari air base on a routine training mission and lost radar and radio contact near Arunachal Pradesh's Doulasang, close to the China border. Their bodies were found eight days after the crash.

Of the 13 Su-30MKI crashes in India since the jet's induction into IAF's fleet in 2002, four have been in the northeast. IAF maintains three Su-30MKI bases in the region – Salonibari (Tezpur), Chabua (Dibrugarh) and Jorhat – housing four squadrons between them, all within 150 to 250 km of the China frontier.

Flt Lt Duragkar's father said his son joined IAF four years ago, hardly expecting to be part of a historic moment like Op Sindoor so early in his career. "He would say, 'Hamari air force chahti toh Pakistan ka naam-o-nishan mita deti (Our air force could have wiped out the enemy if it wanted to)'. My son died for the country. I wish he lived longer to serve IAF and the nation."

The last time they met, the entire family was together. Flt Lt Duragkar's sister Sayali, who lives in the US, had come down to Nagpur for the reunion.

IAF hasn't officially cited Flt Lt Duragkar's participation in Op Sindoor in accordance with norms for operations involving national security, defence officials said.

Sqn Ldr Vashishth's father Anand Kumar Vashishth left for Assam Friday to bring home his son one last time. The pilot's younger brother Manuj, based in the UK, is expected in time for Saturday's funeral at the family's native village of Kakrana in Haryana's Rohtak.

A relative of the Sqn Ldr Vashishth said he joined IAF about a decade ago, inspired by his father, who had served as a subedar in the Army. "He was passionate about flying, somewhat introverted, and a wonderful officer," a colleague told TOI.

Tests show convicts were minors at time of crime

▶Continued from page 1

Counsels for the Bangladeshi national submitted that he was born on Jan 1, 1990, and was a 'child in conflict with law' at the time of the crime. On Feb 8, 2005, he and two others had hacked a man to death in Basirhat near the India-Bangladesh border. While his co-accused died during pendency of the case, he was convicted and jailed in 2005. In 2016, he moved the high court against the conviction.

On April 11, 2022, his appeal came up before a division bench of Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Bivas Pattanayak, which ruled that the JJ Act allows a convict to raise the plea of juvenility even at the appellate stage. The HC then ordered an ossification test.

A report submitted by the additional district and sessions judge of Basirhat stated that the convict was found to be about 36 years at the time of the ossification test conducted recently. Based on that, the district judge determined that the Bangladeshi national was around 16 years old when he committed the crime.

In the second case, the convict was found to be aged 15 years and 9 days when he strangled his 'wife' on Feb 27, 2011. His counsel Achin Jana argued that despite being a minor at that time, he was not tried under JJ Act. The additional district and sessions judge of a fast-track court at Rampurhat, Birbhum, ascertained him to be a minor after the ossification test.

Madras HC: 'Equal work, equal pay' applies only within same institution

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Chennai: The principle of equal pay for equal work applies only when employees work in the same institution under identical service conditions, Madras high court said.

"There cannot be any comparison in respect of employees working in public sector undertakings as well as govt departments. Since service rules are different and distinct, the question of applying the principle of equal pay for equal work does not arise at all," the HC noted.

A division bench of Justices S M Subramaniam and C Kumarappan made the observations while setting aside a single judge order directing the govt to provide equal pay to a lineman employed by Arasu Rubber Corporation Limited, a Tamil Nadu govt-owned public sector undertaking.

"Govt directives issued on various occasions right from 2010 indicate that the implementation of revised scales of pay to the corporation employees on a par with the govt employees should not be done in a routine manner, and approval is to be obtained from the govt," the bench said.

A PSU is fully funded by the govt and, therefore, the financial constraints are to be considered by the govt, the bench added.

Prayagraj cops file FIR against FB user for objectionable remarks on courts

Prayagraj: A case has been registered at Prayagraj Cantt police station against a Facebook user for posting objectionable comments targeting courts and judges.

The FIR was filed on the directions of the Allahabad high court, which took suo motu cognisance of the matter, under section 67 of the IT Act that criminalises publishing or transmitting obscene content in electronic form. The HC directed the Prayagraj police commissionerate to locate the individual and produce him before it by March 16.

Police authorities on Friday formed two teams to catch the accused. Senior officials said cybercrime sleuths are coordinating with Cantt police to catch the offender.

While hearing a criminal contempt plea on Feb 24, a division bench of the high court had warned social media users against hurling online abuses directed at the judiciary that "go beyond the defence of fair comment or informed criticism of a judgment".

The bench had noted with grave concern that, under the guise of freedom of expression, instances of criminal contempt are currently galore on social media. The court said that such virtual abuses cross the line of permissible free speech. TNN

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A thought for today

I wouldn't mind a little bow. In Japan, they bow. I love it. Only thing I love about Japan

DONALD TRUMP

What Explains Trump

Is he a solipsist, the centre of his own universe?

Iran war will end when Trump chooses. Question is when? Some say he'll stop when petrol gets too pricey in US, others say when US casualties rise. All are counting on US midterms in Nov. They reckon Trump can't alienate voters and risk a Democrat takeover of Congress. Perhaps, they haven't listened to him carefully. Yes, Trump wants to win midterms, but not because he loves Republicans. His reason, as he's said, is simply: "If we don't win the midterms…they will find a reason to impeach me. I'll get impeached."

Everything Trump does is about himself. He promised never to drag US into another war, and bring petrol prices below $2 a gallon. On Friday, petrol averaged $3.3, but Trump isn't bothered. "I don't have any concern about it…if they rise, they rise." Trump doesn't care because, in the words of a famous psychiatrist, he is a solipsist. Unlike narcissists, who are self-obsessed but crave others' approval, solipsists are the centre of their own universe. Without an external frame of reference, everything Trump does feels right to him. Insulting Zelenskyy and Ramaphosa, and his own Fed chief, planning a Greenland grab, slamming massive tariffs on every country, abducting the president of Venezuela, or killing the Ayatollah before declaring war.

Trump tests the limits of his powers daily, and is delighted. He warns Brazil to go easy on Bolsonaro, or pay 50% tariff. He threatens Argentinians to back Milei, or forget US assistance. Now he's told Iran he must be "involved in the appointment" of its new leader. Has any other prez done this before? Trump also knows the president's party almost never wins midterms – only 2 out of 20 times since WW2. That's why he's declared he'll accept the result only if it's "honest", like he did in 2020. Meanwhile, he goes on Potusing like there's no third term. There isn't.

Stillborn Ideas

Why netas shouldn't fret about ageing population

Andhra has proposed ₹25k as incentive for couples to produce a third child. Couples are smiling – not about making Baby No. 3, but at CM Naidu's touching faith that ₹25k is incentive at all. Everyone knows, making a baby is one thing, raising a child quite another. It takes a village. A child needs investment in hard cash over many years for food, health, education. Naidu well knows people are having fewer children for very practical reasons – urbanisation, education, high living costs, job insecurity all contribute to falling birth rates.

But why fear an ageing population that Andhra has cited as the cause for its incentive? Policy must square progress in achieving population stability (longevity + falling fertility rate) with innovations that'll cater to an elder population. Ageing societies reflect proper diet, health and living standards. High life expectancy is a sign people are living healthier for longer. That's good, right? Add to that a rapidly automating world. Take Japan, for instance. It doesn't lament its greying society but instead, is encouraging older people to keep working or take up part-time jobs. Companies and govt support training for older workers to stay productive in work where experience counts. It is hugely investing in robots and AI to help in factories, transport, farming and elder care too. It's bringing younger foreigners for work that can't be automated. What it *hasn't* done is ask its people to make more babies. Couples can make babies, no problem – it's for Naidu to provide schools, hospitals, nutrition programmes and jobs for future workers. Give that a second thought.

War And Prince: An Unfinished Kingdom

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is now in trouble

American journalist ***Karen Elliott House*** has been going to Saudi Arabia for nearly 50 years. She has had a firsthand view of the kingdom's evolution, plus conversations with different kings, Jamal Khashoggi, Jared Kushner, Saudi religious police, businesswomen…and of course Crown Prince MBS.

Her book ***The Man Who Would Be King: Mohammed Bin Salman and the Transformation of Saudi Arabia***, is able to give both a historical view of the kingdom and a close-up of the (often ruthless) remodelling underway today. What is left for the future to tell is whether MBS is a visionary reformer or someone who dwindled away the last of his nation's black gold.

mindfield
SHORT TAKES ON BIG IDEAS

It is the juggling of Israel and Iran that is his biggest challenge, with any miscalculation putting at risk even his rule. In 2023, as Saudi Arabia re-established diplomatic relations with its *bête noire*, he explained to a shocked House that he was just facing up to the reality that there "isn't a high chance" of US intervening in Iran. That highly unlikely thing has since happened, and it may upend MBS's plans just as much as Oct 7 did.

Then, he was on the verge of achieving his dream of diplomatic relations with Israel. This was about 1) seriously upgrading security in West Asia, 2) pairing Israeli science and Saudi money to create a technological powerhouse in Neom, a futuristic city that would 3) provide a key logistics hub connecting Asia to Europe. Centrepiece of his Vision 2030, the Neom project is now unravelling.

MBS's grandfather Abdul Aziz founded the modern kingdom of Saudi Arabia after consummating 200+ marriages, to create the Al Saud as a "supertribe". King Salman is the sixth of Abdul Aziz's sons to rule, and his sixth son will take over next, if things go as MBS plans. But will they?

Yes, competing centres of power have been crushed, and young people are mesmerised by the periodic unveiling of gigaprojects, which promise them super modernity and prosperity.

But it all also recalls to House the poem Shelley wrote about the crumbled statue of once-powerful Pharaoh Ramses II: "And on the pedestal, these words appear: My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair! Nothing beside remains round the decay of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare, the lone and level sands stretch far away."

A more lasting legacy in the sands of Neom depends on a post-oil economy. Right now, the kingdom itself guzzles the fourth highest amount of oil behind US, China, and India, despite a tiny fraction of these nations' populations. And, tellingly, Saudis only account for 21% of total employment in their private sector.

Women's empowerment has really powered recent economic growth. Still, as House has said in an interview, while MBS wants to move the economy towards AI and high-tech, young people do not have these sophisticated talents and often end up being some kind of a glorified tour guide somewhere.

Most importantly, the book quotes a retired US intelligence official who has served in both Saudi and Iran: "MBS wants to rearrange the living room furniture but he can't do so during a hurricane." His top priority has been avoiding a wider war in the region, but that could yet be what ruins all the effort to modernise his country.

Why Sheikhdoms Are Shaken

Iran targeting US's Gulf allies hasn't altered investor calculations yet. But they have added a new layer to risk calculations. Kingdoms will now also be assessed in terms of their ability to manage cross-border risks

Khaled Iskef

Columnist based in Dubai

A week since Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's assassination in joint US-Israeli strikes, Gulf is at a dangerous turn facing an unprecedented spillover of the US-Israel-Iran war into Arab monarchies and neighbouring nations. Such a spillover was rarely seriously anticipated. Is it, however, surprising? Not really.

What has been reported as a footnote was in reality a significant message from Tehran – Khamenei, despite repeated threats from Washington and Tel Aviv, as well as warnings from those close to him per sources, never considered switching location to a safer place. That, in the supreme cleric's mind, would contradict his role as Shia's seniormost religious authority and a symbol for the peoples of the region. The Islamic republic was in for the long haul, however militarily smaller it may be.

Iran's response to the assassination and heavy losses of its military and intelligence brass was swift and violent. It took barely three days for it to expand the war into a broad regional confrontation, engulfing not just Israel but most Gulf countries, Lebanon, Iraq and even Cyprus. Tehran deployed an arsenal of ballistic missiles and advanced drones, including cluster warheads against Israeli targets, which also revealed partial failures in Israel's air defense systems such as the Iron Dome and David's Sling.

Of course, Iran is facing very heavy losses. Despite intense media blackout, information leaked about strikes on vital areas in Tehran and cities such as Tabriz, Urmia, Sahand, Masjed Soleyman, Seyed Khandan, Velenjak, and Vanak. Buildings next to official TV HQ (IRIB) were bombed, leading to a temporary halt in broadcasting, and hours-long interruption of official transmissions.

But what is new is that Iran's missile and drone attacks on US bases in Gulf have practically opened a new direct front. A quick round-up of Iran's attacks beyond Israel shows how regional states were attacked in sync.

- **UAE** | Iranian missiles and drones struck Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah resulting in six deaths, dozens of injuries and material damage to airports and civilian facilities within two days of the US-Israeli strike. Air defence systems (Patriot and THAAD) intercepted most threats, but temporary closure of airspace led to suspension of thousands of flights and stranded tens of thousands of tourists and travellers.
- **Qatar** | Iran came close to a hit on US's largest regional military facility Al Udeid Air Base after being repeatedly targeted. Most attacks were intercepted, but air traffic declined sharply, security alerts increased and gas pumping operations were temporarily halted.
- **Bahrain** | Amid scattered pro-Iran demonstrations, HQ of US Navy's 5th Fleet was targeted. Physical damage remained limited, but psychological and impact on domestic security have been significant.
- **Kuwait** | An attack on Ali al-Salem base resulted in at least four deaths, including two Kuwaiti soldiers on Day 3. Three US F-15 aircraft were lost; Washington attributed this to a 'technical failure', while Tehran claimed its air defences shot them down.
- **Saudi Arabia** | Iranian strikes targeted US embassy in Riyadh and Aramco facilities, including Ras Tanura refinery that had been closed preemptively after drones were intercepted.
- **Oman** | Limited damage was reported at ports such as Duqm. Oman, at the forefront of US-Iran deal talks, has maintained a relatively neutral stance throughout the escalation.
- **Jordan** | Attacks focused on a multinational base in eastern Jordan hosting US forces and European units. Debris in civilian areas apart, Jordanian army announced it intercepted 13 ballistic missiles and 49 drones between Feb 28 and Mar 2.
- **Iraq** | Demonstrations erupted in various places in Baghdad, Dhi Qar, Maysan, Basra condemning Khamenei's assasination. Pro-Iran demonstrators attempted to storm the Green Zone to reach US Embassy. When Israeli strikes targeted Popular Mobilization Forces bases on the Syrian-Iraqi border, militia responded with a drone attack on Baghdad airport.

Site of explosion at Fairmont The Palm Hotel in Dubai, Feb 28

With Hezbollah's entry, Israeli offensive expanded in the south and Beirut suburbs, with intense shelling by either side, while a drone attack targeted British base Akrotiri in Cyprus.

It wasn't only oil prices that jumped. US issued urgent warnings for its citizens to leave Gulf countries immediately. UAE and Saudi Arabia withdrew diplomats from Tehran and affirmed readiness to use force in response. UAE has also pushed out campaigns to maintain its reputation as a safe and stable destination.

But no matter the interceptions and reassurances, none of Gulf's counters can eliminate the fear or anxiety that has taken hold of the region as a whole. For decades, Gulf states have presented themselves as an oasis of stability in a turbulent region, building their brand as a safe and secure destination for business and tourism. They have relied on massive investments in infra, business-friendly legislation and free zones, alongside high levels of internal security.

Cities such as Dubai, Doha and Riyadh have existed insulated from neighbouring unrest, to become regional hubs for MNCs and global tourist destinations, underpinned by an image of political stability. But this round of regional escalation has spared none, and so has raised questions of how resilient that image remains, particularly as tensions draw closer to vital geographic and maritime corridors of trade and energy.

So far, escalation may not fundamentally alter investor perceptions, but it does add a new layer to risk calculations. Foreign companies are likely to reassess contingency planning, insurance costs and supply chain continuity, without this necessarily translating into immediate or large-scale withdrawal.

It can be argued security in Gulf can no longer be defined by internal stability, but will now be defined by the capacity to manage cross-border regional risks, safeguard maritime routes and reassure markets swiftly and effectively. How much Gulf States will succeed in containing the spillover impact of US's strikes on Iran and demonstrate institutional readiness is yet unfolding.

Iskef, a journalist, covers West Asian politics & economies

When Your Adult Child Brings Home Someone Else's Adult Child

Marriage is down, live-ins are up, but the living-in is happening at the parents' place. And as this person hobnobs with extended family unlike own sullen brat, it is won over in no time

Shinie Antony

When perfectly sober houses start to tack on ugly extensions or split one room into three, you know the kids are home – for good! They dart out now and then to collect mysterious packages left on the doorstep that have come from the outside world but at all other times their silent presence can be taken for granted.

You can just about ask them if they've eaten – they flick a kindly eye on your frantic efforts to dress up leftovers – but their future plans are a state secret. 'Buy another TV' is the very reasonable request when you ask for the remote.

Barely have you broached the topic of love interests when your family mysteriously gains another member. One day you set the table and see that there's one more person who doesn't like your food.

At first you think it a trick of light, an apparition or someone who lost their way, but when you find yourself baking a cake on their birthday, it is official – your adult child has brought home someone else's adult child. Who too is now living in your house. As far as you are concerned: two eyerolls for the price of one joke.

You wish they'd move out and get a place of their own – but they are very comfy here. So you go on as before, sorting out the washing, ordering the veggies, and making polite chitchat with the latest in-house 'guest'. You are happy kids are bonding with other kids, but you wish they'd bond someplace else, anywhere else. But here they are right under your nose, making you feel like a perv for having eyesight.

The mating game has changed its rules. Sex no longer needs to be dressed up in Kanchipuram saris, sangeet and six-day ceremonies. Swiping left is enough. While this hesitation to marry happily enough means a corresponding fall in divorce rates, setting up home when single brings up a Kafkaesque question: does one need to move out at all? At home they know your favourite dish, your allergies and your laundry is magically done.

The great love marriage vs arranged marriage debate appears only in flashbacks or photo albums. 'See, that's *paati*. She met your grandfather at her wedding.' The fierce ambition of yesteryears to write this exam or bag that promotion is fading,

Image: AI

just like the urge to find The One and live happily ever after. No mom is reminiscing about how she was married and nine months pregnant at your age. No son is singing *Papa kehte hain…*

Of Life And Love
STORIES OF THE WAY WE ARE

The new breed seems to be in no hurry. They switch degrees midway, regret wasting their 20s on the wrong studies abroad, drag feet when it comes to employment, prefer part-time gigs to full-time jobs. Brought up without siblings or maybe one baby sis, the current crop of youngsters is puzzled by their reproductive organs. The infamous question 'any good news?' to the bride and groom as soon as the wedding ceremony was over is now replaced by 'have you frozen your eggs?'

As the traditional foreplay of whispering 'I'm writing the civil services exam' down a female ear gets replaced by 'I live with my parents', romcoms today deal with real estate in a practical manner. When the live-in pal becomes an ex, no need to file for a divorce or fight custody battles. Some more therapy and takeaway are all you have to order.

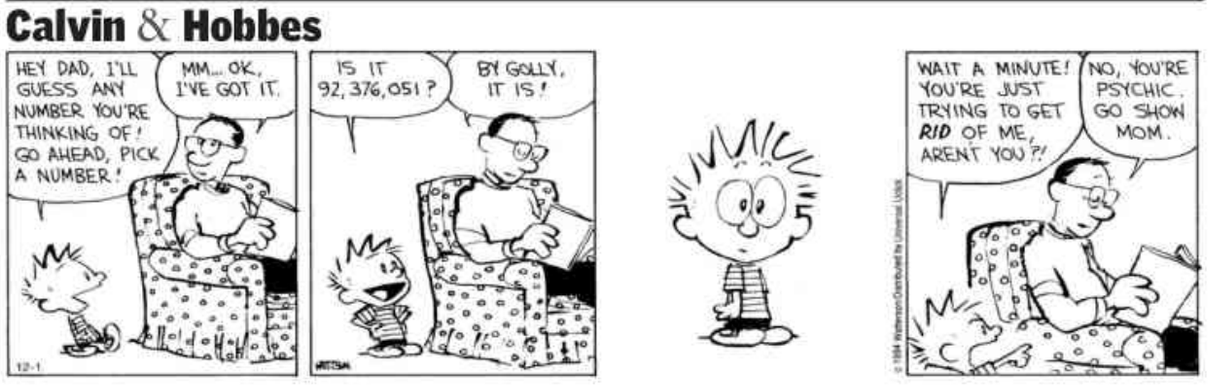
With kids bringing in sundry partners to live with them, at first you hum the golden oldie: *Kuchh toh log kahenge*. Relatives are indeed deployed to come over to confirm the juicy tidbit. Yes, they phone other relatives, there is *someone* there! But as that someone hobnobs more with everyone than own sullen brat, the extended family is won over in no time.

Before you know it, most cousins have a non-son-in-law in place! Someone who has no choice but to listen to all your stories. Yours used to be a nuclear family and now you are rumoured to have started a cult.

You had hoped foolishly that one day the offspring would move out and you would get to visit their domain in turn and comment on the lack of their housekeeping skills. Ah, the bliss of running a finger down a chair's arm and coming away with dust at their place! But then you blink back tears and go back to clearing the mess in your own home – because your *beti* has met someone and is bringing them home. A family that stays together…stays together.

A takeover of your bedroom is underway. Once you were the CEO of a double cot in the master bedroom, now you occupy the living room couch. Sometimes at midnight a young stranger gently wakes you up to inform you that you are out of beer.

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacredspace

I think playing cricket taught me more about working in teams and leadership that has stayed with me throughout my career.

Satya Nadella

Cricket, Like Life, Rewards Courage And Patience

Reuben Ray

Sometimes the deepest lessons of life are revealed not only in scriptures or spiritual discourses but in the simple drama unfolding on a playing field. A moment on a cricket ground can mirror the journey of human courage, faith and aspiration.

In India, cricket has long transcended the boundaries of sport. It has become a shared emotion that unites millions. When a batsman strikes the ball beyond a boundary rope, it does not merely add runs to the scoreboard; it ignites hope and pride in minds of countless admirers.

The modern era of T20 cricket celebrates boldness and innovation. The batsman, today, stands at the crease not merely to defend his wicket but to send the ball soaring into the sky. Yet beneath this thrilling spectacle lies a deeper truth. Cricket, like life itself, rewards those who combine courage with patience and individual brilliance with teamwork.

As the Indian national cricket team prepares to face New Zealand's national cricket team in the final of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, memories return to moments when Indian cricket reshaped its destiny.

One such moment came in 1983. Few believed India could defeat the formidable West Indies cricket team in the final of the 1983 Cricket World Cup at Lord's. India had scored only 183 runs, a total that appeared modest against the champions who had dominated world cricket for years.

THE SPEAKING TREE

But Indian team played with extraordinary determination. When the West Indies were bowled out for 140 runs, India achieved one of the most remarkable victories in sporting history. That triumph did more than win a trophy. It awakened confidence in a nation and inspired a generation of young Indians to believe that courage can overcome even the most daunting challenges.

Nearly three decades later, another historic moment unfolded in Mumbai during the 2011 Cricket World Cup. Under the calm and composed leadership of MS Dhoni, India pursued Sri Lanka's target with remarkable composure. When Dhoni struck the winning six into the night sky at the Wankhede Stadium, the roar of the crowd carried the emotion of a billion hearts celebrating a dream fulfilled.

Great cricketers often remind us that the game reflects realities of life. Sachin Tendulkar once observed that cricket teaches humility because every innings begins from zero. Sunil Gavaskar has emphasised that temperament, the ability to remain calm under pressure, distinguishes a truly great player.

In many ways, the boundary line in cricket symbolises the invisible boundaries we encounter in life. Fear, doubt and hesitation often stand like silent fielders guarding our aspirations. To clear these boundaries requires courage, discipline and faith in our abilities.

Cricket also reminds us that no victory is achieved alone. A team wins because individuals learn to subordinate personal glory to a larger purpose. A bowler who delivers a decisive spell, a fielder who saves crucial runs, and a batsman who anchors the innings, all contribute to a shared triumph.

Thus, the game becomes a quiet teacher of life's deeper values – perseverance in adversity, humility in success and unity in effort. Swami Vivekananda once proclaimed, "Strength is life; weakness is death." Every player who walks onto the cricket field embodies that spirit of strength and courage.

TIMES SPORT

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Behind Pacer Jasprit Bumrah's Constant Evolution Is An Insatiable Appetite For Success & Hours of Tireless Training Sessions

'BOOM' IN INDIA'S STEP

AFP

Arani.Basu@timesofindia.com

Two evenings before the Super-8 match against South Africa in Ahmedabad a fortnight ago, Jasprit Bumrah opted to bowl in an empty net, with two boots placed on either side of the batting crease. He kept hurling yorkers for a good 45 minutes. It was a drill he had started in Dharamshala during the T20I series against South Africa last Dec.

Mohammed Siraj arrived at the practice area to bat in the adjacent nets, walked up to Bumrah and said, "*Aapko kya zarurat hain yorker practice karne ka? Aap toh beech raat ko neend se uthke bhi yorker maar sakte ho* (Why do you need to practice bowling yorkers? You can get up from sleep in the middle of the night and land those yorkers)!"

Bumrah smiled, nailed another perfect yorker which displaced one of the boots, and said, "*Bahut zarurat hain bhai* (it's very important)."

At 32, after multiple injuries and many match-winning performances across formats for over a decade, Bumrah still puts himself through drills that a 16-year-old would do at academy level. It just speaks of his constant hunger to be the best and remain at the top.

Bumrah has been bowling up to the stumps and the boots in the nets throughout this World Cup campaign. One of his yorkers even landed on the left toe of Ishan Kishan ahead of the match against Namibia last month in Delhi.

On Thursday night, in a tense semifinal against England in Mumbai, every yorker sent down by Bumrah was on point, helping to choke England's chase.

Finding another gear in tense situations, on the biggest stage, is nothing new for Bumrah. His spell of 2/20 in the last T20 World Cup final against South Africa was T20 bowling perfection. In this edition, he has shown he can improve on it.

Thursday's spell of 1/33 in a match that saw a match aggregate of 499 runs, and that too with a lot of dew present at the Wankhede Stadium, was the performance of a bowler in supreme control of his craft. That captain Suryakumar Yadav chose to bowl Bumrah out in the 18th over, when Jacob Bethell was on a rampage, proved he is still the No. 1 option when the Indian team is under pressure.

Bumrah usually wears a coy smile after the perfect execution of his deliveries, be it the dipping slower balls, the zippy bouncers or the toe-crushing yorkers. He has also mastered the art of mentally distancing himself from 'outside' chatter and remains detached from any possible criticism. He has looked cold-blooded in the way he has gone about his job in this World Cup.

India came into the tournament flaunting Varun Chakravarthy's mystery spin as the trump card, but it is Bumrah who has covered up for him and risen to the occasion. It didn't come as a surprise when England captain Harry Brook said, "Bumrah is a very good bowler, arguably the best of all time at the minute. He's been a very good bowler for a long time."

Bumrah knows he is the most complete pacer going around. He also knows that to maintain that, he has to train like a rookie every day.

JASPRIT BUMRAH IN T20Is

	M	Wkts	Ave	Best	SR	ER
Overall	94	117	18.57	3/7	17	6.55
2016-22	60	70	20.22	3/11	18.3	6.62
2023-26	34	47	16.10	3/7	15	6.42
In wins	70	94	17.11	3/7	16	6.39
T20 WC 2016-26	25	36	14.75	3/7	15.3	5.75
T20 WC 2026	7	10	15.9	3/15	14.4	6.62

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Match by Match in 2026 T20 WC

vs Namibia	1/20
vs Pakistan	2/17
vs Netherlands	1/17
vs South Africa	3/15
vs Zimbabwe	0/21
vs West Indies	2/36
vs England	1/33

'I understand my role in the XI'

Opener Samson Reaps Rewards Of Going Back To Basics

Gaurav.Gupta@timesofindia.com

Mumbai: Sanju Samson was quick with his response when reminded that he had missed out on two centuries. "Missed out? I haven't missed two centuries. One of the best moments of my life is happening, so I'm grateful," he said.

This has been Samson's World Cup so far. His unbeaten 97 off 50 balls helped India chase down 196 against West Indies in a virtual quarterfinal in Kolkata. That was followed by a fearless 89 against England in the semifinal.

Against England, Samson stitched a 97-run stand with Ishan Kishan and then added 43 with Shivam Dube. It's clear his decade-long experience has given him clarity about his role.

"I was timing the ball well and making good decisions. I've played 300-400 T20s, batted from No. 1-6 and captained an IPL franchise. I understand what the team needs and my role in the XI. That clarity helps you score runs the way you want to," he said.

For a player who spent years grappling with inconsistent opportunities, scrutiny and self-doubt, Samson finally seems to have arrived with a bang. Asked if he felt lighter, the 31-year-old quipped, "One more match. Then I'll feel very light.

"I waited with patience, worked hard, trained a lot. But we still have one more step to go. If we do that, then everything will be worth it," he said.

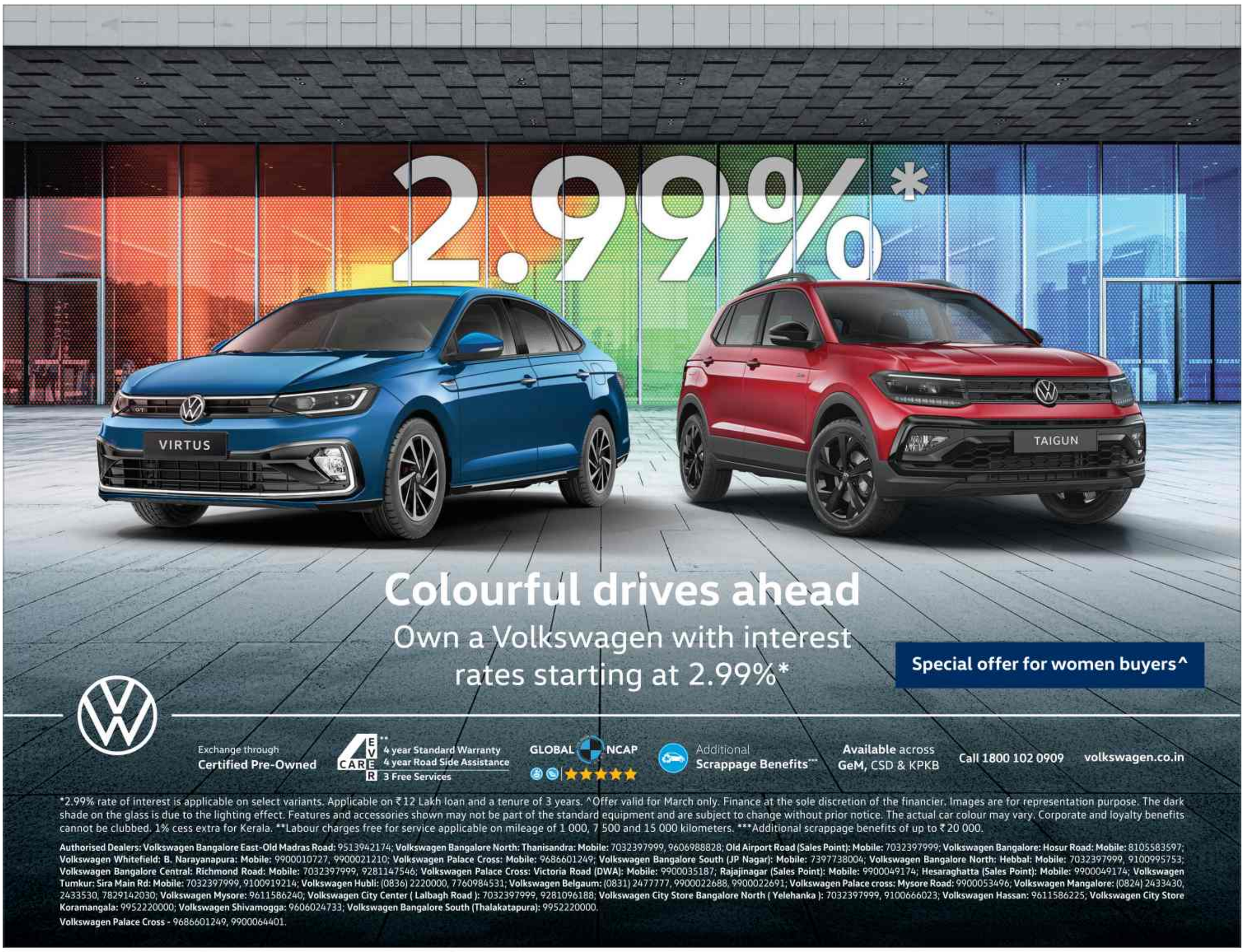
From being dropped after the series against New Zealand to playing hero in a World Cup semifinal, the Kerala batter has risen like the phoenix. "

"That phase was very challenging," he admitted. "I was trying a bit too hard to make an impact and get into the World Cup XI. In T20, even the best struggle to score runs."

Samson among 8 nominees for player of the tournament

Sanju Samson's name figures in the ICC's eight-man shortlist for the T20 World Cup player of the tournament.

The others are England's Will Jacks, Pakistan's Sahibzada Farhan, South Africa's Lungi Ngidi and Aiden Markram, New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra and Tim Seifert and American bowler Shadley van Schalkwyk.



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WHEN AXAR OWNED THE NIGHT

After Two Stunning Catches And A Key Wicket In Semis, The Allrounder Is Now Eyeing A Bigger Show In Front Of His Home Crowd In The Final...

Pix: Reuters, IANS

(Above) 4.1 overs: Axar Patel sprints back 24 metres before diving forward to take a spectacular catch after a slower ball from Jasprit Bumrah deceives England's Harry Brook in Mumbai

(Below) 13.6 overs: Will Jacks' drive off Arshdeep's low full toss is grabbed by a running Axar, who flicks it to Shivam Dube before crossing the rope

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Mumbai: Wankhede Stadium's North Stand gave Axar Patel a rousing ovation as he settled into his fielding position at long-off. The applause was well-deserved. Within a span of about 40 minutes, Axar had produced game-changing fielding efforts that will be etched in Indian cricket folklore, much like Kapil Dev's catch in the 1983 World Cup final and Suryakumar Yadav's effort in the 2024 T20 World Cup summit clash.

The 32-year-old had already taken one catch to dismiss Phil Salt when he produced the moment that lifted the team's spirits and energised the crowd. It began with Jasprit Bumrah deceiving Harry Brook with a slower delivery with the first ball of his spell. The England captain skied the ball, which looked set to land safely in the deep cover region. Stationed inside the ring, Axar believed he could reach it. Sprinting back with his eyes fixed on the ball, he judged the trajectory perfectly and flung himself forward to complete a superb diving catch inches above the ground.

The second effort came in the 14th over and swung the match decisively in India's favour. Jacob Bethell and Will Jacks had stitched together a threatening 77-run stand off 39 balls for the fifth wicket.

Jacks sliced a full toss from Arshdeep Singh towards deep point, and once again the ball hung in the air. Axar, patrolling the boundary, sprinted across, held his balance and, just as he seemed to lose control, lobbed the ball to Shivam Dube before crossing the boundary, reducing England to 172/5.

In between those efforts, Axar also used his guile with the ball, slowing the pace to dismiss Tom Banton, who had been scoring at a strike rate of over 350. He could have taken another blinder at long-off to dismiss Bethell as he neared his century, but the chance slipped and went over the boundary.

India's fielding had been a concern in the T20 World Cup, with 13 dropped catches before the semifinal. But led by Axar, the team produced a sharp display in the field, holding on to every chance — a positive sign heading into Sunday's final against New Zealand in Ahmedabad.

Asked which of the two catches he cherished more, Axar responded with humour, saying the "ball had decided to chase me". He added that Brook's catch was difficult but Jacks's dismissal was more crucial as it broke a dangerous partnership.

Axar may not carry the aura of some of his teammates and has occasionally been overlooked. He had to hand over the T20 vice-captaincy to Shubman Gill during the 2025 Asia Cup and was benched for two matches in this tournament at his home venue, the Narendra Modi Stadium, against the Netherlands and South Africa.

Yet Surya's deputy has always been a team man. He spent those games in the dugout carrying drinks, cheering his teammates and waiting patiently for his chance — something he has done throughout his career. Axar has taken eight wickets with his left-arm spin in six matches at an economy rate of 8.09, the second-best among Indian bowlers after Bumrah's 6.62.

The Gujarat allrounder has also had to wait to play an ICC tournament on home soil, having missed the 2023 World Cup due to injury. With Axar now certain to feature in Sunday's final, he is eager to play in front of his home crowd — with his son watching him live "for the first time".

"I think that's why I didn't play those two matches (as I had to play the final), because it is very important for me," Axar said. "I have been waiting for many years to play in front of my family on my home ground. It's a very proud moment. After two years, I will be playing on home ground — and that too in an ICC World Cup final."

On social media trolls calling the Ahmedabad stadium "jinxed", Axar replied with a smile: "I didn't play that game (the 2023 World Cup final), so now I think the jinx will be broken!"

'Phenomenal' Bethell nearly steals the show

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IANS

Mumbai: Jacob Bethell flung himself to make his ground, akin to a swimmer's last dash to the finish, but he knew he was just short. The left-hander lay flat on the pitch, with his face down, as the Wankhede erupted and Indian players celebrated around him. That run out took India over the line in the semifinal against England.

Till Bethell was at the crease, the Three Lions' chase was alive and had forced the Men in Blue into a huddle. During his 85-minute stay at the wicket, the 22-year-old showed England are grooming him as an all-format player since his debut in 2024. Incidentally, Royal Challengers Bengaluru splurged Rs 2.6 cr on him in the 2025 IPL auction. At 21, he became the youngest overseas player to debut for the IPL franchise.

Bethell came to the crease with England in dire straits at 38/2. The partisan crowd was roaring at the top of its voice. Many would have wilted considering the stage and the pressure, but performing against the odds is what separates the great from the merely good.

Bethell rose to the occasion, cut out the noise, created his own bubble and on a belter of a pitch, showed his cricketing smarts to create a flutter in the Indian camp before England fell seven runs short of the 254-run target.

Skipper Harry Brook was all praise for the youngster with whom he would like to play "for a long time". "In a high-pressure situation, the way he played that innings was just phenomenal," said Brook. "He was in his own bubble and it's an amazing feeling (when that happens). You feel like you could hit nearly every ball for six, and it was one of those innings tonight that he's pulled off. It was a ridiculous knock. He should be extremely proud of what he has done tonight. He is going to be a very good player for England in the long run."

The knock in Mumbai meant Bethell became the first batter to score his maiden first-class, List 'A' and T20 century at international level. All have come over the last seven months. He first touched the three-figure mark in ODIs with his 82-ball 110 against South Africa in Sept 2025 in Southampton. Then came a Test century — a 265-ball 154 — in the final Ashes Test against Australia at SCG in Jan this year, followed by his maiden T20I ton on Thursday.

"I think they're not comparable (Test ton in Sydney and T20I one in Mumbai). The skills and the mental thinking are different between the two but both have come in a losing cause. It's a weird feeling," said Bethell, who will return to India in few days to trot out for RCB. "Cricket is a cruel game as personal performances don't always solidify into team performances. Both of those are tough pills to swallow, but I'm very proud of both and the way I went about both knocks."

Brendon McCullum and Co. were criticised when Bethell was included in the England squad as he had not scored a century at the domestic level in any format. But the Barbados-born batter has let his bat respond to the noise.

"I have never really looked at the chat around that stuff (no century in domestic cricket). I always had the self-belief to be able to do it and now that it's been done, hopefully I can just add to the tally in all three formats," Bethell said after becoming only the fourth England player to score centuries in all three international formats after Jos Buttler, Dawid Malan and Brook.

280 **Jacob Bethell**'s tally is a record for most runs by an England batter in any edition of the T20 World Cup. The previous best was Jos Buttler's 269 at an average of 89.66 in six innings in 2021-22.

45 Balls taken by Bethell to race to his 100 vs India on March 5, 2026. It is the quickest by an England batter in T20 World Cups and the second quickest in the tournament's history behind the 33-ball ton by NZ's Finn Allen vs SA in Kolkata on March 4, 2026.

—Rajesh Kumar

'India could field three teams for this WC'

Yogesh Chavda

GETTING READY FOR THE BIG BATTLE: New Zealand's Glenn Phillips at the nets in Ahmedabad on Friday

Glenn Phillips Proud That Kiwis Are Competing For Crown In Spite Of Much Smaller Talent Pool

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Ahmedabad: For a nation of just 5.3 million people — smaller than many of the world's major cities — New Zealand's cricketing rise over the past decade has been remarkable. The Black Caps have reached eight major ICC finals, including the 2015 and 2019 ODI World Cups, the 2021 T20 World Cup and the 2025 Champions Trophy. They also lifted the inaugural World Test Championship in 2021 and made the semifinals of the 2023 ODI World Cup.

Their women's team are the reigning 2024 T20 World Cup champions while the men's side now stand on the brink of their maiden T20 title when they take on India in the final of the T20 World Cup here on Sunday night.

On Friday, New Zealand allrounder Glenn Phillips highlighted the contrast between the two cricketing nations. With India's population exceeding 1.4 billion, Phillips noted the depth of talent available to the hosts, suggesting they could easily field three competitive sides in a T20 World Cup. New Zealand, by contrast, must rely on a far smaller talent pool.

"Obviously we have a few less people in our country to choose from, which means our high-performance programs have to be very specific and tailored to the population we have," Phillips said ahead of New Zealand's training session. "But the talent that comes out of India is phenomenal. They could probably pick three sides that would compete just as evenly in this World Cup. So for us to go out and compete with teams around the world with such a small population is fantastic."

Phillips, meanwhile, refused to discount India's out-of-form mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy, who conceded 64 runs in four overs against England in the semifinal at the Wankhede Stadium on Thursday. "We've played him quite a few times now, which helps," Phillips said. "We'll just try to face one ball at a time. He's allowed to have a good day, but we're also allowed to have a good day."

'Bumrah is human as well'

Phillips also acknowledged the threat posed by pacer Jasprit Bumrah, whose spells have proven decisive in the hosts' last two matches. "We had a really good trip against him in the bilateral series but he's a class bowler," Phillips said. "Bumrah has so many variations and hits the blockhole at the death incredibly well. But he's human as well."

Brook backs McCullum to continue

'Coach Has An Aura In The Dressing Room And Everyone Looks Up To Him'

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AP

Harry Brook with coach Brendon McCullum during training ahead of the semifinal against India

Mumbai: Calling Brendon McCullum "the best coach I've ever had", England's white-ball captain Harry Brook urged the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) to retain the New Zealander as the team's all-format head coach after England's seven-run semifinal loss to India. McCullum's future has come under scrutiny following England's poor Ashes tour of Australia, where they lost 1-4.

After England's narrow defeat to India, McCullum said he would "love to carry on," with Brook insisting the former New Zealand captain remained "125%" the right man for the job. Brook said his partnership with McCullum had flourished since he took over as white-ball captain in April last year. "Our partnership has been really good since I took over. We get on very well and the communication has been outstanding. Long may it continue," Brook said.

"I've said plenty of times he's the best coach I've ever had. He has an aura in the dressing room and everyone looks up to him. What he achieved as a player was unbelievable and he's carried that into his coaching. Over the last four years he's changed English cricket for the better."

Brook also credited the culture of resilience in the side — something he believes McCullum helped foster — as England repeatedly fought their way back into matches during the tournament. "The boys have fought their arses off and we've been in the game until the very last ball almost every match," Brook said.

Despite winning six of their eight games, England never quite produced a complete performance during the World Cup. In the semifinal, England mounted a strong fightback, finishing at 246/7 in reply to India's imposing 253/7 on what Brook described as a "bowlers' graveyard".

Fighting the disappointment of the exit, Brook said he was proud of the team's spirit. "Disappointed but extremely proud. As a captain I couldn't ask for much more. We've had an amazing campaign."

Brook also admitted he had let India off the hook by dropping Sanju Samson at mid-on when the wicket-keeper-batter was on 15. "Catchers win matches, don't they?" Brook said. "Unfortunately it didn't stay in my hands. He played a very good innings and arguably won them the game. It's not ideal, but it's happened now."

EXTRAS

Dravid, Ashwin to buy ETPL franchise?

Legendary players Rahul Dravid and R Ashwin are part of an Indian consortium set to acquire a franchise in the European T20 Premier League (ETPL), according to a report in London. The consortium has agreed a deal to buy the Glasgow-based franchise in the six-team tournament taking place this summer, according to a report in the 'BBC Sport'.

Dybala out for six weeks: Roma will be without Argentine striker Paulo Dybala for over six weeks with a knee injury, Italian media reported on Friday. According to La Gazzetta dello Sport and Sky Sport Italia, Dybala underwent surgery in Rome on Friday after suffering "a complete longitudinal tear of the external meniscus".

Real fined 15,000 euros: Real Madrid have been fined 15,000 euros ($17,364) after a fan was spotted performing a Nazi salute during their Champions League playoff second leg match against Benfica last week, UEFA said on Friday. Real Madrid said after the game that they had requested the club's disciplinary committee to "initiate an immediate expulsion procedure for the member" who was caught on cameras performing the Nazi salute.

Pacers keep India in the hunt after batting collapse

Getty Images

BIG PRIZE: Indian pacer Sayali Sathghare (centre) celebrates the wicket of Alyssa Healy of Australia in Perth on Friday

Perth: Jemimah Rodrigues fought bravely with a fifty but other India batters failed to counter the swing generated by Australian pacers Annabel Sutherland and debutant Lucy Hamilton, getting bundled out for a lowly 198 on the opening day of the one-off day-night Test here on Friday.

Rodrigues (52, 84b) looked fluent but did not have much backing from the rest of her colleagues.

The Indian pacers maintained a fine line outside the off-stump to nick off three Aussie top-order batters as the home side was placed at 96 for three at close. Australia trail by 102 runs.

The Aussies elected to field, and the decision proved right by Sutherland (4/46) and Hamilton (3/31) who bowled at a fair clip and produced disconcerting movement. Left-arm pacer Hamilton struck the first blow, removing Smriti Mandhana in the sixth over itself, with a peach that came into the left-hander.

WOMEN'S CRICKET

Shafali Verma (35) looked good for more, but Sutherland managed to move the ball just the right amount to find her outside edge for stumper Beth Mooney to finish the formalities.

Debutant Pratika Rawal (18), skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (19) and Deepti Sharma (7) departed without making any significant contributions, as India slipped to 107 for five. A 43-run association between Rodrigues and Richa Ghosh (11, 41b) for the sixth wicket carried India to 150. However, Rodrigues and Ghosh fell to Hamilton and Ash Gardner in the space of an over as India once again found themselves in trouble at 150 for seven.

A 38-run alliance between the two other Indian debutants, Kashvee Gautam (34 n.o.) and Sayali Satghare (7, 35b), for the ninth wicket helped India move closer to 200. Pacer Satghare (8-1-24-2) had an even better moment soon when she castled Aussie opener Georgia Voll (2).

It started moving in from the off-stump line and went past Voll's defence to rattle her leg-stump. India managed to dismiss an edgy Phoebe Litchfield (9) and skipper Alyssa Healy (13), who is playing her final match for Australia, to reduce the Aussies to 58 for three. But Ellyse Perry (43 batting) and Sutherland (20 batting) helped the hosts to navigate through the rest of the night.

Brief scores: India (I innings): 198 all out in 62.4 overs (Jemimah 52, Shafali 35, Kashvee n.o.; Annabel 4-46, Lucy 3-31) **vs Australia (I innings): 96/3 in 27 overs** (Ellyse 43 n.o., Annabel 20 n.o.; Sayali 2-24). PTI

Powered by twin wins

Third seed Vaishnavi Adkar and Ankita Raina, seeded eighth, continued their impressive run at the ITF W35 tournament. After they won their respective singles quarterfinal contests, the Indian duo paired up to storm into the final of the doubles event in Kalaburagi on Friday.

Vaishnavi delivered a clinical performance to defeat Elina Nepliy 6-1, 6-3 in the quarterfinals, while Ankita was equally dominant, brushing aside Evgeniya Burdina 6-0, 6-2 to book her place in the last four.

ITF

Later, the Indian pair combined effectively in the doubles semifinals, edging past Sonal Patil and Bela Tamhankar 7-6(5), 6-2 to secure a spot in the final. Vaishnavi set the tone early in her singles match, striking confidently off both wings to break Nepliy in the second game and race to a 3-0 lead. Though Nepliy tried to disrupt the rhythm with well-placed drop shots and forced a lengthy deuce battle, Vaishnavi remained composed, pushing her opponent into errors to extend the lead to 4-0.

Nepliy managed to hold serve once late in the set, but Vaishnavi comfortably closed it out 6-1. The second set followed a similar script.

Results (Quarterfinals): Vaishnavi Adkar bt Elina Nepliy 6-1, 6-3; Ankita Raina bt Evgeniya Burdina 6-0, 6-2; Thasaporn Naklo bt Anchisa Chanta 6-4, 6-1; Jasmijn Gimbrere bt Maayan Laron 6-2, 6-2.

Doubles (Semifinals): Vaishnavi Adkar/Ankita Raina bt Sonal Patil/Bela Tamhankar 7-6(5), 6-2; Akanksha Dileep Nitture/Soha Sadiq bt Sravya Shivani Chilakalapudi/Michika Ozeki 6-7(7), 6-0, [10-5].

ON A ROLL: Ankita Raina in action on Friday

BFC look to bounce back in away game

Kolkata: Mohammedan Sporting Club will take on Bengaluru FC as both sides aim to secure a crucial victory in their ISL on Saturday at the Kishore Bharti Krirangan here. Sporting head into the fixture after suffering consecutive defeats, including a 1-5 loss to Mohun Bagan SG. The Black and White Brigade will be eager to bounce back and secure their first points of the season.

The Black and Whites are currently sitting at the bottom of the table without a point from three matches, while the visitors are seventh with four points from three matches.

Mohammedan SC head coach Mehrajuddin Wadoo emphasised his team's focus on the necessity of coping with the pressure of the ISL. "Every single match is tough in the Indian Super League. We are playing with an all-Indian squad. We need a bit of time to cope with the pressure and intensity. The team is constantly evolving and improving. Only three matches have been played. We need to play regularly to be competitive with the other ISL teams. We must be at our very best to compete and try to secure a positive result," said Wadoo.

Mohammedan goalkeeper Padam Chettri said, "We need to spend more time together as a team. The results will definitely follow."

INDIAN SUPER LEAGUE

Bengaluru FC, meanwhile, arrive in Kolkata aiming to bounce back from their first defeat of the campaign. Renedy Singh's men sit sixth in the standings with four points, coming off a disappointing 0-2 loss to Punjab FC.

The sides have met twice previously in the ISL, sharing a perfectly balanced record of one win and two goals each. Mohammedan won their last meeting in January 2025, securing a 1-0 away victory in Bengaluru courtesy Mirjalol Kasimov strike. Acknowledging the home support of the Mohammedan fans, and the need to convert possession into points, BFC head coach **Renedy Singh** shared his views on the upcoming match.

"We need to score to win matches. The key is not to chase the game. We must defend well, stay compact, and then look for our chances to score. At the same time, we have to improve our defending from set-pieces," said Singh.

Bengaluru FC midfielder Vinith Venkatesh said: "The morale inside our dressing room is extremely high. Everyone is motivated to give their best and clinch three points. We want to win the next game and climb the points table. Against Punjab, we fought until the end and created chances, but we were not at our 100 per cent defensively." **On Friday:** Mohun Bagan 5 (Maclaren 14, 24, 45+2, 88; Rodriguez 42) bt Odisha 1 (Rahim Ali 43); Jamshedpur FC 1 (Eze 57) bt Inter Kashi 0. **Today's matches:** Mohammedan SC vs Bengaluru FC (5 pm), Kerala Blasters vs Chennaiyin FC (7.30 pm)." AGENCIES

SNAP SHOTS

Pranavi shoots 66

Pranavi Urs carded a bogey free 6-under 66 to place herself in top-10 after the second round of the Australian Women's Classic. Pranavi, who shot even par 72 in the first round is now 6-under for 36 holes and is tied-seventh. She is the best of the four Indians playing this week. Diksha Dagar (69-73) was T-22 while Avani Prashanth (77-72) and Hitaashee Bakshi (82-69) despite a 13-shot improvement in the second round, missed the cut.

Aditi in top 10 in China: Indian golfer Aditi Ashok opened her week at the Blue Bay LPGA with round of 4-under 68 to be placed T-7, in Hainan Island, China. Aditi began her round on the back nine and made a bogey on the 13th before bouncing back with a birdie on the 14th. She made birdie on the 18th as well to close the back nine with a score of one under. On the front nine the 27 year old made birdies on the third, sixth and eighth to close the round with a score of 4-under par.

Sharma off to a fine start: Shubhankar Sharma shot 4-under par in the first round after play was suspended early at Joburg Open. Sharma was 4-under through 14 holes and T12 when play was suspended due to darkness. He was two shots behind the five first round co-leaders, Jayden Schaper, Nathan Kimsey, Max Steinlechner, Angel Ayora and Dan Bradbury, who carded 6-under 64 each in Johannesburg.

Lahiri moves into top-10: Anirban Lahiri (66-65) moved into the top-10 after the second round at the Liv Golf Hong Kong. At nine-under for T-10 position, he was five behind Dean Burmester and Carlos Ortiz, who are the co-leaders.

DYES score: Powered by consistency, DYES, Mysuru, Mounts Club and Beagles stormed into the quarterfinal of the Mathru Cup state-level basketball championship for women. In the league engagement, DYES made lightwork of MCHS' challenge with a 53-22 win. Beagles also maintained their form, winning by a 51-36 margin against Kolar BA. **Results:** SWR: 80 (Sruthi Arvind 26, Bhandhavya 25) bt B'lore Vanguards: 37 (Aditi 19) HT: 39-12; DYES Mysuru: 53 (Sanika 12) bt MCHS, BC: 22. HT: 28-10; Mounts BC: 59 (Nakshatra 14, Venisha 9) bt Koramangala BC: 20 (Nitya 7, Hishita 5) HT: 27-12; DYES, Vidyanagar: 43 (Ishitha 29) bt YMMA BC: 23 (Sakshi 6, Anjalee 6) HT: 32-6; Beagles BC: 51 (Chythanya 10) bt Kolar 35 (Ranjitha 12, Ganavi 7) HT: 26-21; HBR BC: 52 (Mahika 15, Aditi Nair 10) bt Rovers, Dharwad 43 (Deepika 26, Shridevi 12) HT: 22-24; Rajmahal BC: 87 (Nikitha 35, Aadya Aithal 21) bt B'lore Sporting BC: 42 (Thanushka 10, Amulya 9) HT: 41-23.

Basketball refs exam on Mar 8: The Karnataka State Basketball Association will conduct the referees examination on March 8 at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium. Contact: 94490-50667 or ksbba08@gmail.com.

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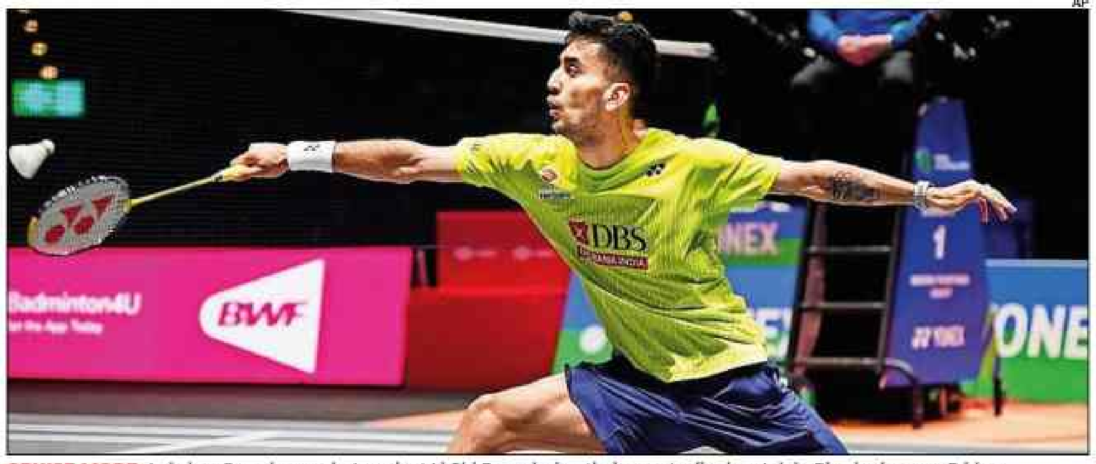

CRUISE MODE: Lakshya Sen plays a shot against Li Shi Feng during their quarterfinal match in Birmingham on Friday

Lakshya lords over Feng

Marches Into Semifinals With Straight-Game Victory

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Lakshya Sen stormed into the semifinals of the All England Championship with a 21-13, 21-16 victory against former champion Li Shi Feng in Birmingham on Friday. This would be Lakshya's third semifinal appearance, who also lost in the 2022 finals of the Super-1000 tournament.

The Almora shuttler was in full flow against Li in both the games.

The Chinese shuttler, who suffered a serious ankle injury at the World Tour Finals in December was not at his best and struggled to keep pace with the Indian. Lakshya started with a five-point lead (11-5) by the break in the first game. Thereafter, he did well to protect that cushion.

After the break, Li cut down the lead to 9-12, but Lakshya did not to succumb to pressure. He not

ALL ENGLAND

only smashed hard but also retrieved well. At 15-12, both were involved in a 65-shot rally, which was won by the Chinese shuttler. And just when it looked like the momentum was shifting, Lakshya came up with a six-point burst to clinch the first game. In the second, Li started with a 3-1 lead before Lakshya secured the next five points. Though he had only a one-point lead at the break (11-10), Lakshya dominated the second half of the set as Li struggled to catch up with the Indian.

Lakshya will play the winner of the quarterfinal between Koki Watanabe of Japan and Victor Lai of Canada in the semifinals.

From the bottom-half of the draw, Lin Chun-Yi of Chinese Taipei and Kunlavut Vitidsarn of Thailand also reached the semfinals.

Qualifier Parry ends Venus' desert dream

Seven-time Grand Slam champion Venus Williams was sent crashing out at Indian Wells on Thursday, falling in three sets to French qualifier Diane Parry. The 45-year-old Williams, playing on a wild card at the prestigious ATP/WTA Masters 1000 event, rallied from a set and a break down to force a third set, but Parry, ranked 111th in the world, stormed through the decider for a 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 6-1 triumph.

"It's always so fun," Williams said. "Of course, losing isn't fun, but it's great to play in front of a home crowd."

INDIAN WELLS

While the Californian star is enjoying competition since returning last July from a 16-month hiatus, Williams was mum on the chances fans would see her and sister Serena play together this year. "You'll have to ask her that," Williams said to the question that has bubbled in the tennis world since 23-time Grand Slam champion Serena re-entered the anti-doping testing pool.

In men's first-round action, Bulgarian veteran Grigor Dimitrov booked a second-round meeting with top-seeded Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz with a 6-4, 5-7, 6-4 grudge match victory over Terence Atmane, who had beaten the former world number three in Acapulco last week. AFP

Reuters

ON COURSE: Diane Parry

Medvedev arrives

Russian tennis player Daniil Medvedev has made it to Indian Wells for the ATP/WTA hardcourt Masters 1000 after being stuck in Dubai for several days amid Israel and the United States' war with Iran. Medvedev was spotted working out in the warm-up area near Stadium Court One along with compatriot Karen Kachanov -- who was also unable to leave Dubai after the ATP tournament won by Medvedev on Saturday. AFP

Gukesh halts winless streak

Prague: World Champion D Gukesh ended a winless streak, beating David Anton Guijarro of Spain in the ninth and final round of the Masters section of the Prague International Chess festival that concluded here. But Aravindh Chithambaram sparkled in the last round as well, defeating David Navara of Czech Republic to finish joint second.

After a string of draws and three losses earlier in the tournament, Gukesh was finally able to show his mettle in what was a well-played game by the Indian ace.

CHESS

Guijarro, who succumbed to his third loss in a row, was no match for Gukesh in creativity and was grounded in the endgame. Meanwhile, Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan won the tournament after an easy draw with white against Hans Moke Niemann of United States.

There was more good news for the Indians on the final day in the Challengers' section where Divya Deshmukh defeated Hrbek Stepan of Czech Republic to finish on a creditable third spot. PTI

Foxy fancied for feature

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Beh-trained Foxy—to be ridden by Aditya Waydande—appeals most in the field of six runners for the Radha Sigtia Trophy, the feature event of the races here on Saturday. Pradeep Chouhan-schooled Your Unforgettable (Yash Narredu-up) looks to be the next best. First race starts at 5 pm.

1. Aziz H Ahmedbhoy Trophy 2400M: Diego Garcia 1, Exuma 2. **2. Euphemia Plate 1200M:** Storm Majesty 1, Paloma 2. **3. Osman Chotani Plate 1800M:** Viking 1, Mighty Hero 2. **4. Radha Sigtia Trophy 1000M:** Foxy 1, Your Unforgettable 2. **5. Indian Nave Trophy 1400M:** Undercover 1, Mulan 2. **6. 1805 Trophy 1000M:** Regal Galleria 1, Arbitrage 3.
Day's best: Undercover.
Jackpot: 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6; **Treble:** 3, 4 & 5.

SBI cruise past DTDC

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: The State Bank of India's (SBI) mix of youth and experience combined well to steer the bankmen to a 54-run win in the KSCA Group II (I Div) league cum knockout tournament here recently. Chasing SBI's competitive 260/6, DTDC were restricted to 206/9.

Invited to bat, SBI were given a fine start by Lochan Gowda and Prakhar Chaturvedi (71), their opening stand of 44 runs coming off 20 deliveries. Lochan's dismissal in the fourth over brought Sidharth Akhil (62) to the crease.

KSCA TOURNEY

The two youngsters flayed the DTDC bowlers with a 123-run association, before Sidharth was dismissed by Pranav Bhatia (2/38). Prakhar followed soon after. After a brief period of lull, SBI's charge picked up momentum with Shivaraj S scoring an explosive unbeaten 23-ball 70 (4x4; 8x6). DTDC lost early wickets, but Pranav Bhatia (44 n.o) and Avinash D's 21-ball 51 kept them in the chase, but the SBI bowlers were on point.

Seasoned medium pacer Sharath HS polished the top-order en route to a five-wicket haul, which put the match beyond DTDC's reach.

Brief scores: State Bank Of India: 260/6 in 20 overs (Lochan Gowda 30, Prakhar Chaturvedi 71, Sidharth Akhil 62, Shivaraj S 70n.o; Pranav Bhatia 2-38, Abul Hasan Khalid 3-50) bt **DTDC Sports Club: 206/9 in 20 overs** (Vijaya Raj 31, Pranav Bhatia 44n.o., Avinash D 51; Sharath HS 5-34) by 54 runs. **NR Sports Group: 152/7 in 20 overs** (Tushar Singh 51, Venkatesh M 26; Darshan MB 2-26, Suresh Karani 2-32, Shivraj H 2-20) lost to **Central Excise & Customs: 156/4 in 19.2 overs** (Aashish Mahesh 37, Niranjan 37, Thippa Reddy 31; Lankesh KS 2-23). **Railway Institute South, Hubbali: 162 all out in 20 overs** (Suraj Ahuja 28, Rahul Rawat 36; Monish Reddy 2-24, Dileep Kumar 2-32, Gagandeep K 2-32, Rahul Prasanna 2-44) bt **HAL Sports Club: 144/9 in 20 overs** (Sumukha Prasad 28, Nathan D'Mello 39, Satish B 29n.o; Sanjay Sihag 4-24, Madan Krishna 2-13, Sunil Kumar 2-33).

Piastri fastest at home GP

Melbourne: Oscar Piastri delighted home fans by putting McLaren top of the timesheets in the second free practice for the Australian Grand Prix on Friday as struggling Aston Martin had a minor win by nursing both cars through laps. Hometown hero Piastri lapped Albert Park in one minute, 19.729 seconds on a sunny afternoon, 0.214 seconds ahead of Mercedes drivers Kimi Antonelli and George Russell. Piastri ran sixth quickest with a compromised run plan in the first practice (FP1) session after being hit with power unit calibration issues before completing a lap. McLaren teammate and defending champion Lando Norris also suffered reliability issues, with a transmission problem costing him lap-time in FP1. He placed seventh in FP2 after being 19th in FP1. Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton was fourth quickest in FP2 ahead of fifth-placed teammate Charles Leclerc in 1:20.267. REUTERS

Promise for sports, boost for water sports

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: The Karnataka state budget on Friday brought cheer to water sports enthusiasts, with chief minister Siddaramaiah announcing the establishment of a Centre of Excellence (CoE) for kayaking and canoeing at

Hesaraghatta lake in the capital under the PPP model.

Another major announcement that will be welcomed by the athletics fraternity is the organisation of marathons in four districts. "National-level marathons will be organised under the Sashaktha Karnataka programme for Rs 10 lakh each in Belagavi, Gokarna, Chitradurga and Hampi. Additionally, district-level marathons will be organised in the name of famous sports personalities in ten districts for Rs four lakh each," the CM said.

While Mysuru will get a velodrome at Dattagalli, a sports science centre will be set up at Kalaburagi. Among other major announcements were plans to set up a sports training hostel in Virajpete in Kodagu district and a new wrestling arena in Belagundi in Belagavi.

AT A GLANCE

Wrestling arena: Belagundi, Belagavi; **Sports hostel:** Virajpete; **Sports science centre:** Kalaburagi; **Velodrome:** Dattagalli, Mysuru; **Taluka stadia:** Bangarpete, Muddebihala, Guledagudda, Kanakapura, Kukanur & Maski. TNN

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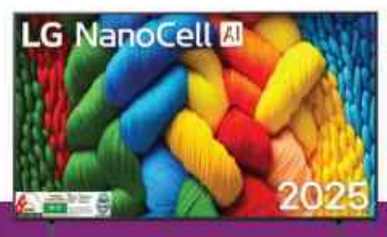

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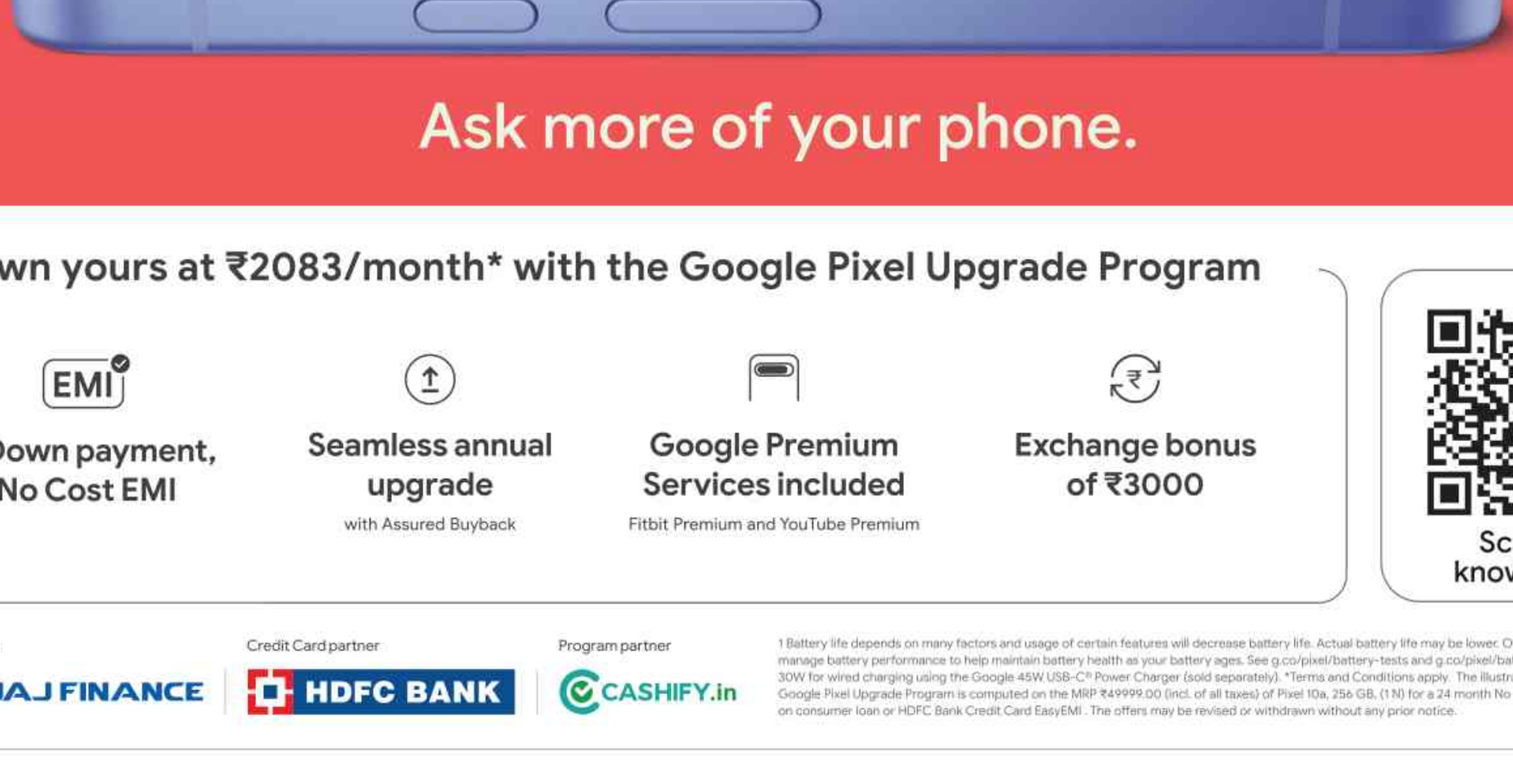

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